



Contributions to Political Science

Julen Zabalo

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Leire Escajedo San-Epifanio *Editors*

Made-to- Measure Future(s) for Democracy?

Views from the Basque Atalaia

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Editors


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Contemplating from the Basque Atalaia the Challenges Posed by the Different Forms and Scales of Contemporary Democracy



Igor Filibi , Julen Zabalo , and Leire Escajedo San-Epifanio 

Abstract For various reasons, which are explained in this chapter, Basque society is a privileged vantage point (atalaia in Basque) from which it is possible to approach the emerging forms and scales of contemporary democracy. From this vantage point, we contemplate the dangers and inadequacies of Western democracies, and the ways in which, from the local to the global, strategies, experiences and new democratic proposals are spreading. All these phenomena are grouped into four blocks, to which various contributions are made throughout this book, in the conviction that in the face of the current erosion, it is time to develop a new present for democracy. First, there is a block of analysis and reflections on the neoliberal attempt to domesticate democracy, in which the first chapters of this collective work are located. Second, there is a section analysing the new citizenship practices that are emerging in Western democracies. Third, there is a section on the evolution of the concept of participation and the new practical strategies to which it is giving rise. And, fourth and finally, attention is given to the fourth block, on the methodologies and research approaches that are currently used to observe democratic phenomena.

Keywords Erosion of democracy · Deepening democracy · New forms of participation · Evolution of democracy

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1 Envisioning the Future of Democracy Between Twilight and Emerging Forms and Scales, Views from the Basque Atalaia (Watchtower)

The most common use of the word *atalaya* (a term of Arabic origin that in Basque is written *atalaia*) is an architectural reference to high buildings, normally towers, from which to survey extensive areas of land or sea. The first documented references to the presence of *atalayas* on the Basque coast date back to the beginning of the fourteenth century, although it is thought that they were first used in the eleventh century or even earlier. For centuries, they served, among other things, to warn fishermen of the arrival of storms and the presence of shoals of fish and, above all, of whales. They also detected vessels heading for port, especially those that were in difficulty and needed to be tugged to safety, and enemy ships. Their exceptional location enabled them to fulfil an extremely important function in fishing ports, and they are often described as “eyes on the sea”, because communities that live by the sea need to observe it constantly, particularly in areas like the Basque Country where the coast is rugged and wild and the sea rough. In figurative terms, the same expression is used to refer to the quest to find positions (or states) from which it is possible fully to discern a reality. Referring to democracy as a reality and seeking to observe it from a single watchtower would be more a naive than utopian act, because although the classical vision of democracy, based upon the expressions *demo* (the people) and *kratos* (rule), and its fundamental principles appear simple (Popper, 1998), there is no consensus regarding the precise definition of this term. It is an overarching concept that not only is projected upon the functioning of the institutions and mechanisms of citizen participation in political decision-making but also has a profound relationship with phenomena such as equality-inequality, freedom of expression, justice, poverty and education, among many others (Krauss, 2016).

In a recent interview¹, Anne Applebaum, author of the book “*Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*”, emphatically declared that the symptoms of the weakening of democracy at a global level are evident and that unlike in earlier eras, that weakness is apparent not only in recent democracies, but that North American and European countries with a long democratic tradition are also experiencing these symptoms. That idea of decline, along with the analysis of the symptoms of weakness and phenomena that reflect it, has become a persistent commonplace during the last decade, particularly intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. The future of democracy, added Anne Applebaum, cannot be regarded as already written; its survival or demise, says the author, depends on the decisions taken in this respect. Modern democracy, caught between its liberal and radical versions and besieged by reactionary alternatives, has continued to spread across the planet. In turn, capitalism has been transformed into corporate capitalism. There has also been clear erosion of the social state and of the conception of the public in

¹Gerardo Lissardy, interview with Anne Applebaum, BBC News, 2 September 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-58391147>

recent decades, in the context of the hegemony of neoliberal ideas. The crisis of 2008 does not appear to have taught any lessons. There is a certain risk of increasing extremism and authoritarian tendencies, in a climate marked by a false debate over the primacy of efficiency and security over democracy and rights. This is creating the temptation to “return to the state”, but rather than to the social state, to the “strong”, authoritarian state of the twentieth century, re-centralised and critical of transnational political (but not economic) scales. Centrality of the concept of innovation, but restricted in turn to economic and technological spheres, and conditioning their scope in the public and institutional space to compliance with requirements of functionality and efficiency according to neoliberal criteria. This work seeks to contribute to that reflection and adoption of those decisions and strategies for an adaptation of democracy that would facilitate its survival.

There is considerable academic interest in this question. The SCOPUS database includes over 90,000 documents related to the term, and it is evident that interest in the issue has grown since the 1990s and has increased exponentially in the context of the two major global crises of the twenty-first century: the economic crisis of 2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic. Searches of other scientific databases, such as the Web of Science, generate similar results, illustrating the huge and growing academic interest in democracy (Bornmann & Mutz, 2015). Another noteworthy characteristic of this evolution is the way in which fields of study and approaches to the complex thematic terrain of democracy have diversified.

In this context, the innovative aspect of this work is the atalaia from which the question is addressed. The starting point is the premise that Basque society is an exceptional atalaia from which to contemplate the emerging forms and scales of contemporary democracy. It shares with other work methodologies the desire to explore the dangers, shortcomings and challenges facing Western societies in the light of the decline of democracy and the emergence of new political scales in which the concepts and tools of classical democracy prove unsatisfactory. But it has an important differentiating element, which is that the main reference of the texts, projected onto scales that range from the local to the global, are strategies and experiences of Basque society.

Let us turn to the Basque Country. It is located in the easternmost part of what is known in English as the Bay of Biscay, in reference to one of the provinces of which it is composed, straddling the French and Spanish states. It is formed by seven historical territories, divided into three regions under different authorities: to the west, and within the Spanish state, the Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco comprises the provinces of Biscay, Gipuzkoa and Araba, the most densely populated; in the centre, the Comunidad Foral de Navarra, direct successor of the Kingdom of Navarra, independent until the sixteenth century; and to the north of Navarra, within the French state, the Comunidad de Aglomeración del País Vasco, with the provinces of Lapurdi, Baja Navarra and Zuberoa. A country named after its own language, Basque, a non-Indo-European tongue, completely unique in Europe, today coexists with Castilian and French.

In more relative terms, the location of the Basque Country is particularly interesting. It is part of Western Europe but in a southern state, of which it is an economic

and political motor. However, its interest as a watchtower from which to observe the emerging forms and scales of contemporary Western democracy does not arise from these characteristics, but from the fact that Basque society has been and is a genuine social and political laboratory. The question of identity is, perhaps, the one that has attracted the most attention, given its repercussions beyond Basque borders. This is, therefore, one of the prime examples in Europe of cultures that lacked state expression during the nineteenth century, resulting in sometimes tragic consequences, with repeated confrontation, both internal (more than once in the form of war) and external. In the case of the Basque Country, a significant part of the population continues to question its belonging to Spain or, to a lesser extent, to France, as is demonstrated by the high degree of adhesion to a sentiment exclusively Basque identity. And without going so far, only a minority accept solely French or Spanish national identity, in its most traditional sense, while there is frequent expression of dual identities that reject other exclusive and exclusionary interpretations.

Less well-known is the Basque Country's endless search for its own institutional and democratic model. This search for its own model, one that adapts to the region's social needs and resolves its problems, is only a particular expression of a general question: democracy only works if it is adapted to each specific scenario. Although inspired by values and principles considered being universal, it cannot be exported from other realities or imposed from outside. Democracy, giving the people a voice, must respect their particular characteristics and even their capacity to make mistakes, as one only learns from one's own errors. When errors are made as a consequence of external factors, there is a danger of the population considering that the flaw lies not in that particular model, but in the very concept of democracy itself.

Basque society has learned the hardest way that democracy is the art of living together, aware of the significance of recognising diversity and difference and finding means of respectful coexistence with difference. In this sense, one could say that respect for others is one of the best and most necessary civic virtues that make democracy possible. Democracy makes it possible, in the deliberative process, to perceive that the points of view of social groups, however deep-rooted they may be, do not necessarily have to be shared, and this realisation endows the population with a certain civic humility. Democracy is, for this very reason, a school of democracy, which is why it is so important to experiment with and test innovations, which may prove empowering in other places.

There is also heated discussion over how to distribute power among the different political and institutional scales, which have gradually evolved in parallel with European supranational integration. In the case of the western Basque Country (the *Comunidad Autónoma Vasca*), the internal institutional system accords ample autonomy to its three regions, and in turn, this regional structure is included within the regional system of the Spanish state, creating a complex system that, moreover, is understood by most of the population still to be in the process of construction. This constant revision and discussion of the basic categories of the liberal order is also, of course, discussion about the central aspects of democracy. In other words, for decades in the Basque Country, there has been an intense process of reflection upon the very presupposition of democracy, the national demos, and upon the way

of democratically articulating diverse political scales, questions of legality and legitimacy, as well as debate over the various forms of democracy: representative, participative, deliberative, etc.

The result of all these factors is that in the Basque Country, these debates are held in different terms from elsewhere, and that in addition, these questions are not restricted to academic reflection, but are widely socialised; they form part of the public debate. This singular situation means that it is worthwhile adopting a different vision of what is a global subject. The goal of this book is, therefore, to offer some visions of democracy from the perspective of Basque society, by analysing emerging strategies of participation along with academic approaches to democratic participation. The project is led by Parte Hartuz, a research group within the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), with a special interest in democracy. Since 2002, this group has brought together dozens of researchers from different areas of knowledge, always within the social sciences, and has channelled their investigations in both the academic and educational fields, as well as collaborating with other popular movements. The volume also incorporates contributions by other established authors, which complement and enrich the work structured into four blocks.

Professor Argimiro Rojo opens the work with the text “The Challenge of Finding a Cosmopolitan Democratic Model”. The author proposes a reflection upon the importance of international political scales and, increasingly so, the global scale. Processes of globalisation and diverse political and technological developments suggest the need to reconfigure political frameworks and create an effective political and institutional scale at a global level, a cosmopolitan democratic model. This is followed by the first part, which addresses, with projections on different scales of governance, the tensions between the liberal visions of democracy and the voices that question the latter. There is then a block focused on emerging frameworks and scales (Part II), another of analysis of new forms of citizen participation (Part III) and a block specifically dedicated to the relevance of revisiting the methodological and epistemological frameworks that generate knowledge about democracy and mechanisms of citizen participation (Part IV).

2 Question of Scales: The Tensions Generated by the Neoliberal Attempt to Domesticate Democracy (Part I) and New Practices of Citizenship in Emerging Scales and Frameworks of Western Democracy (Part II)

In her book *The Moral Basis of Democracy*, Eleanor Roosevelt (1940) said that when hundreds of people are homeless and hungry, it is time for us to stop and reflect upon how much democracy we have and how much we would like to have. Decades later, we are asking ourselves about not only the quantity or quality of democracy to which we aspire but also what is meant by the proposal for more

democracy. So much use has been made of the expression that the concept of democracy appears to have become blurred at the edges and offered its services to forms of oppression that, being somewhat nicer than those of the past, run the risk of going unnoticed. Guilluy believes that Margaret Thatcher's old claim that "There is no such thing as society", has finally come true (Guilluy, 2019).

It is probable that never before in history has there been simultaneous use of so many and such diverse interpretations of democracy and citizen participation. It is true that when there is talk of democracy, we are faced with a competitive exegesis with regard to the meaning of the term (Mouffe, 1993), and to a certain extent, this has resulted in the idea of democracy fluctuating and always being a matter of degree. During the last decade, however, we seem to be witnessing the height of the struggle to appropriate the term democracy, regardless of content. It has become one of those multivocal symbols that can be employed with opposite meanings.

Among the most noteworthy phenomena are those practices that are arbitrarily labelled as participatory or real democracy, and in which the demos upon which they are based and, even more so, the kratos really exercised by those who take part, are very debateable. Demo-fiction easily disguises itself as "real" democracy, an expression that makes it possible to label as unreal or false other formulae of participation.

The chapters in this first block analyse how domesticated versions of democracy are dissipating the democratic paradigm and making people lose sight of the obvious: "Society is made up of people, and the strength, resilience and adaptability of a society depends wholly on those traits in its people" (Shah, 2016: 10). Every level, from the local to – in particular – the global, has major economic deficits. Structural inequality precludes citizen participation that could be interpreted as deliberative; emphasis on individual liberty makes it impossible to adopt shared decisions with regard to the well-being of all.

In this scenario, it is essential to recover, reinforce and, when necessary, reinvent both mechanisms of participation and pillars of well-being, including the redistribution of wealth and the guarantee of minimum living standards. With a structuralist and intersectional reflection, Martínez-Palacios and Ahedo present the contribution "The neoliberal commercialisation of citizen participation in Spain". They provide empirical material in relation to instruments of participation and reflect an institutional tendency that, although it is the object of analysis in Spain in particular, is symptomatic of a trend that can also be seen in other Western democracies.

In a dialogue with the aforementioned chapter, Azkune, Goikoetxea and Romero address "The Basque union majority in the face of systemic exclusion", focusing on the role of trade unionism in a context of neoliberal hegemony. Via reference to Jessop's strategic-relational approach and Foucault's governmentality, attention is drawn to the tensions of democracy, and there is emphasis on the positive contribution made by Basque trade unionism. Thirdly, and with projection on a global scale, Lekue and Tellería explore "Responses from urban democratization to global neoliberalism". On the basis of urban critical theory, the chapter presents participatory experiences that local governments and urban movements have been promoting in recent years with the view to intensifying democracy.

The second part reflects upon how democracy is evolving, in order to adapt to emerging scales and forms and new frameworks of action. Modern democracy emerged within the state, giving way to the nation-state, and on the whole, democracies in recent centuries have mostly been national. But this state-national scale has gradually been relativized, affected by increasing processes of interdependence and globalisation, promoted by corporate capitalism. The emergence of supranational and global scales, as well as phenomena on local and regional scales, has given way to a complex multiscale framework. The infrastructure of modern democracy, beginning with state sovereignty, and the ability of nations to provide solid foundations for societies and national markets have been called into question.

Thus, with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, Igor Calzada explains how it has prompted a re-emergence of the historical debate between the state as provider, the guarantor of public safety, and the civil liberties that citizens should enjoy. The article points to the need to study the new ways and possibilities of developing democracy and participation, in what he terms “postpandemic technopolitical democracy”. Comparing the urban and the global scale, Jordi Borja analyses the inability of states to address the numerous problems posed by today’s world, which results in growing inequality, and proposes a reappropriation of urban public space. For their part, Filibi and Uncetabarrena analyse from the Basque watchtower the evolution and current situation of European democracy, suggesting that the construction of a European democracy should serve to improve the model of the nation-state, and not only to construct the same system on a larger scale.

From a different angle, Azkargorta, Vazquez and Albizu choose the global scale, because this provides the opportunity to analyse society’s structural problems as a whole and offers a perspective of emancipation based on the construction of unity, solidarity and cooperation between the different responses and alternatives to the current capitalist and neoliberal world system. With the study of the case of the International People’s Assembly (IPA), the authors explore the project to build a global democracy. Finally, Curto and Huarte discuss popular power as the subject of democratic transformation. They analyse the emergence of community dynamics in which collective subjects create new forms of power and new political logics to organise and develop society, thereby questioning both the neoliberal subject and the project of liberal democracy in crisis.

3 Deepening Democracy: Analysing Practical Strategies of Participation (Part III) and Research Methodologies (Part IV)

It has long been suspected that the way in which elites formulate political questions hinders the participation of those who lack the necessary social or cultural resources. The consequence of this would be a hidden census, which filters the official version and restricts the participation of a growing sector of the population (Gaxie, 1978).

This tendency has been reinforced by the neoliberal participatory shift that, far from organising interest in participation, appears to be designed to maintain the political disinterest that guarantees that there is no increase in the number of competitors in the field of power (Martínez-Palacios, 2021: 366).

But what do we understand by “participate”? In recent decades, there has clearly been an evolution in the way of understanding the concept, as there has been in the way of understanding democracy and citizenship itself. On the basis of those restrictive forms of participation (channelled institutionally and directed at the government, the state or political elites), Norris’s proposals (2002) represent an advance in the extension of the concept, in its affirmation that the activities that seek civil or social impact or strive to change systematic patterns of social behaviour may be considered types of political participation. In an attempt to develop the concept, van Deth (2014) proposes four types of political participation: a first type of institutional, conventional or formal participation; a second type of non-conventional, non-institutional, or contentious political participation; a third, which includes types of civic, social or community compromise; and lastly a type of individualised and expressive political participation. Although this classification has been the object of discussion (Hooghe, 2014; Hosch-Dayican, 2014; de Moor, 2016), it illustrates the current need to redefine the concept of political participation in order to interpret the increase in emerging and changing participatory practices, which flow between different private and public, political and economic spheres.

It is perhaps youth that best reflects these changes. Thus, the political participation of young people in Europe and other parts of the world is increasingly defined by the development of practices that are not contemplated in institutionalised forms of participation, and of hybrid or mixed repertoires (Hustinx et al., 2012; Sloam, 2016; Monticelli & Bassoli, 2016).

The need to reformulate and extend citizen political participation is related to processes of neoliberal globalisation and the repositioning of states in complex fields of political power. These processes have intensified the construction of practices of citizenship that are increasingly removed from the formal citizenship defined by the state (Sassen, 2003). In the liberal paradigm, citizenship has been conceived as a set of elements that connect individual agency and state political order. This model has now been surpassed. Indeed, as the formal rights of citizenship have been undermined, greater significance has been acquired by a multiplicity of processes and actors of citizenship that are not formalised in political systems, which develop alternative forms and practices of participation.

This leads us to the major theme of representation. Andrea Greppi has suggested that what has been deeply eroded is the very idea that a subject is authorised to act in the name of and on behalf of others (Sermeño & Aragón, 2017: 32), something that social movements had already proposed, but which is now generalised. The rich and powerful avoid contact with the masses, are neither worried about public issues nor feel obliged to contribute to community services, but strive not to lose control of power. The middle classes, until recently the bastion of liberal democracies, contemplate their present and their future, with concern, and have begun to question their support for a system that seems to have turned its back on them. The popular

classes are beginning to say out loud that those who are governing in their name do not in fact represent them.

Various authors have been speaking for some time of a crisis of representation, frequently contrasting the oft-criticised representation with the promising and supposedly more democratic participation. However, when these arguments have appeared to be more convincing in academic circles and more powerful within public opinion, dissenting voices have been heard. Nadia Urbinati dedicated a book to the defence of “the arguments of the minority that believes democracy and representation are complementary rather than antithetical”. Her goal, she added, was “to inquire into the conditions under which representation is democratic”, arguing that “representative democracy is an original form of government that is not identifiable with electoral democracy.” (Urbinati, 2006: 4)

Within this democratic rediscovery of representation (Urbinati, 2006: 5) we can include Andrea Greppi, who, far from contrasting representation and participation, claims that “they are different moments within the same process, a return journey from deliberation to decision and vice versa” (Sermeño & Aragón, 2017: 22–23). This author warns of the risk of disqualifying and eliminating representation, since “the alternative to (representative) democracy is not to be found in (supposed) democracy without representation, but in the administration of huge doses of repression and political violence (...)” (Sermeño & Aragón, 2017: 18).

Are elections a valid form nowadays of representing a society’s views? Not really, as Mair (2013) has already observed. With the disappearance of the type of voter loyal to ideas represented by a specific party, a voluble electorate emerges, which does not identify with a party’s ideology, but more with a form of political consumption. Greppi also points out these insufficiencies, but this cannot mean totally abandoning the concept of representation, since, according to the author, democracy and representation are necessarily connected, and eliminating the latter would not result in a revitalisation of the former. Moreover, in his opinion, “human beings are representative beings” (Sermeño & Aragón, 2017: 11 & 12). For this reason, some kind of representation has to exist.

If Greppi warned of the erosion of the very capacity to speak with authority on behalf of society, Urbinati indicates the need for a democratic theory of representative democracy to involve “a revision of the modern conception of popular sovereignty that challenges the monopoly of the will in the definition and practice of political liberty. It marks the end of a yes/no politics and the beginning of politics as an open arena of contestable opinions and ever-revisable decisions” (Urbinati, 2006: 224–225).

As we commented at the beginning, Basque society is an interesting laboratory with regard to the search for institutional and political models that adjust to its social and community needs, and the contributions in block III focus on four very diverse elements.

Firstly, links are established between social movements, with their criticism of the simplistic vision that identifies electoral participation with participation in democracy, the right to self-determination, and, specifically, one of the major innovations in relation to this concept, which is the right to decide, based on the principle of democratic radicalism (López, 2011). The chapter by Vizán-Amorós, Zabalo

and Álvarez approaches this theme in the Basque context, and analyses the discursive evolution of sovereigntist social movements with regard to self-determination and the right to decide.

It is among the young that significant changes are perceived in terms of understanding participation. Larrinaga, Odriozola, Amurrio and Iraola's study on Basque youth reveals that an interest in politics can follow paths other than those heretofore regarded as traditional. The authors analyse the process of political socialisation of Basque youth today and its repertoires of political participation, and their conclusions reinforce the extended redefinition of the political.

If we speak of participation and citizenship, it is interesting to link these with migrants, as the latter are often seen as temporary guests in host societies, and not as potential citizens. The chapter by Fullaondo and Moreno enters this debate, and contributes a wealth of data in relation to the Basque Autonomous Community. The analysis shows the relationship that exists between the social and political participation of immigrants and their perception of immigration. The block ends with another vulnerable sector, larger now, that of people who use social services. However, few works address in theoretical or empirical fashion the role of the social services as key agent in processes of democratic intensification (Pastor, 2017). The chapter by Zubillaga and Bergantiños analyses social services from a democratic perspective and underlines the importance of participation as a core element for social services committed to a strategic community perspective.

In the fourth and final part, we have sought to pay particular attention to a question often ignored by the literature: the need to reflect upon the instruments and methods via which knowledge of democracy is generated, as each form of understanding it, with its theoretical tenets – explicit and implicit – conditions the way in which it is investigated, measured and analysed. This leads us to the need to tailor methodologies and techniques of research to different conception of values, priorities, subjects, etc. First of all, however, Rodríguez Villasante provides an extensive review of the discussion of participatory methodologies over the last 50 years.

An important question in all this is the function that the university should fulfil in processes of citizen participation and deepening of democracy: get involved, remain neutral and keep a distance, seek consensus or mediation between opposing opinions and sectors.... The book provides good examples of reflection on the basis of specific experiences. On the one hand, professional-university collaboration, with the chapter by Berasaluze, Epelde, Ariño and Ovejas, who present the development and results of recent research undertaken in the academic field of social work.

On the other hand, collaboration between universities and popular movements is possible. The chapter by Gorostidi, Martínez and Ormazabal indicates the type of contribution that the university, in its social responsibility and when it works in collaboration with the general public and their networks of collectives, can make to processes of democratic experimentation and reinforcement of community initiatives. All of this is based on two specific experiences of community participation in which power relations between those governing and the governed have been transformed.

In a final reflection, Zugaza, del Hoyo and Ureta explore the possibility of an important contribution by feminism, intersectionality. This is an excellent tool with which to make visible the relationality of oppression on grounds of gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, origin, age or functionality, and it is therefore totally consistent with the overall theme of the book, the deepening of democracy. The assumption is that projects of emancipation and social transformation require interpretative frameworks that make it possible to complicate and problematize one-dimensional and disempowering approaches to oppression.

4 The Challenge Caused by the Erosion of Democratic Values

With the end of the Cold War, self-satisfied voices were heard that announced the end of history and the universal triumph of liberal values (Fukuyama, 1989, 1992). Western academia rushed to theorise the problems of democracies in the process of consolidation and to find the best way of exporting the model to new countries. Robert Dahl stated in 1998 that “The twentieth century was a time of frequent democratic failure (...). Yet it was also a time of extraordinary democratic success. Before it ended, the twentieth century had turned into an age of democratic triumph. The global range and influence of democratic ideas, institutions, and practices had made that century far and away the most flourishing period for democracy in human history” (Dahl, 1998: 145). The traditional problems of liberal democracy, exacerbated by the discontent caused by neoliberal policies and the crisis of 2008, were not seriously addressed. This represented a major loss of legitimacy of the system itself in central countries. Thus, studies of democracy began to focus on the problems of young democracies or those in the process of consolidation, to consider the decline of the very idea of democracy and the policies required to correct that decline (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

However, in spite of this triumphalism, Western democratic systems in fact suffered from a number of serious problems in terms of both their functioning and their legitimacy (Habermas, 1973, 1976; Offe, 1984). In parallel, the elites began to repudiate the social pact, arguing that there was now an excess of democracy. The Trilateral Commission Report detected a series of problems, such as the government’s loss of authority, fuelled by some intellectuals and the mass media, the constant growth in demands on the part of citizens, which extended the public sector and incessantly increased public debt, as nobody dared to raise taxes for fear of upsetting the electorate (Crozier et al., 1975).

In line with this diagnosis – which omits the vast military expenditure during the Cold War –, Samuel Huntington, one of the authors of the report, concluded by saying that “some of the problems of governance in the United States today stem from an excess of democracy (...). Needed, instead, is a greater degree of moderation in democracy”. This moderation should be applied in two areas. On the one hand, “In

many situations, the claims of expertise, seniority, experience, and special talents may override the claims of democracy as a way of constituting authority. (...) Second, the effective operation of a democratic political system usually requires some measure of apathy and non-involvement on the part of some individuals and groups” (Crozier et al., 1975: 113–114).

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the main transnational corporations were all financial, but more spectacular still was the expansion of the financial dimension of the economy. This offshore economy, dominated by finances and structured around London-New York, is not only economically powerful, but also, even more so, socially and politically (Wójcik, 2011: 2). Apparently at least, the economic and political elites did not learn any meaningful lessons, and their insistence on maintaining policies of deregulation and austerity aggravated the problems and increased social inequality, as has been evidenced by numerous reports and studies (Oxfam International, 2014; OECD, 2008, 2011, 2018, 2019; United Nations, 2020). This means that the legitimacy deficits inherent to our social system continue to be neglected (Gonnet, 2020).

Social discontent became growing political discontent, which was expressed in support for anti-system discourse and movements and via the creation of new political options (Castells, 2017). There is evidence of a general trend in democratic systems, characterised by the erosion of democratic values, the loss of hegemony on the part of traditional parties in numerous countries, huge ideological and political polarisation and the emergence of political options that have attempted to serve as an alternative to the traditional democratic system. Ensuring the suitability of the epistemological and methodological frameworks employed when reflecting upon the future of democracy is strategically crucial.

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The Challenge of Finding a Cosmopolitan Democratic Model



Argimiro Rojo Salgado

Abstract There is no doubt whatsoever that the current political structure of world society does not correspond to the objective needs of humanity as a whole. Issues that assume global dimensions can only be suitably addressed by means of a public authority whose power, constitution and means of action are also of a global dimension. In this sense, it is logical to consider the prospect of, or need for, a world government. However, the fact of taking politics onto the global stage should not entail the dissolution of democratic politics or, in other words, the loss of fundamental rights and freedoms, constitutional guarantees, citizenship or public space within our societies. This is one of the great challenges currently facing us, which obliges us to invent another form or other forms of democracy more in tune with the global era. The search for some kind of response to this challenge is, indeed, the fundamental requirement of this study.

Keywords Democracy · World government · Globalization · Cosmopolitanism · Citizenship · Nation-state · European Union

1 Introduction

The proposed demand for a global government is not born of mere speculation or dreaming, nor of a cosmopolitan choice or belief that one might profess. This proposal should be regarded as a pragmatic request and as the most appropriate political-institutional response to the characteristics of a world increasingly unified by the intensification and acceleration of processes of communication and

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interdependence on a planetary scale, and of a world beset, moreover, by systemic problems and crises that, like meteorological phenomena, spread quickly and powerfully, ignoring national borders and overwhelming the capacities of states the world over. An attentive and calm reading of what is taking place within the international system reveals states that, after many centuries of existence and gradual consolidation all over the planet, are showing clear signs of their inability to guarantee, the governability of societies conditioned by the logics of globalisation (Rojo Salgado, 2016).

Responding to global challenges from within the narrow limits of the nation-state is simply anachronistic and absurd. It is no longer possible to tackle global problems effectively with a collection of local responses, so a global imperative prevails. Held (2012) wonders, in this respect, why nowadays politics too should not be global, when other aspects of human life (health, disease, ecology, economy, social life, science, culture, sport) already are. This is, without a doubt, one of the great paradoxes of our time: everything is globalised except for politics and democracy; in other words, while we witness the emergence and spread of a planetary civilisation, in the political order, we remain anchored in the pre-planetary phase (Bummel, 2017).

On the basis of the idea of what Waldron (2005) calls “the circumstances of politics”, that is, considering that politics arises when the existence of social conflicts and disagreements renders necessary some kind of collective action or decision to manage the situation, we should identify the current existence of those objective conditions necessary for the practice of politics on a global scale to emerge and establish itself. A global politics that should not abandon one of its main conquests, attributes and defining features, which is its democratic dimension. However, what democracy can be practised on a global scale? A democracy the same as or only analogous to the one we have been using within the confines of the nation-state? Does taking politics onto the global stage force us to invent another form or other forms of democracy in keeping with the global era? Are we facing the challenge of finding a cosmopolitan democratic model?

The attempt to seek some kind of answer to these questions is the goal and purpose of this study, which, by way of a preliminary question, proposes a reflection upon what is involved in taking politics onto the global stage and upon the democratic principles and procedures that should inform that new, globalised political arena.

2 What Is Involved in Invoking Politics and Taking It Onto the Global Stage?

Contemplating the need for a planetary government means invoking politics and taking it onto the global stage, thus transcending the monopoly of politics by the nation-state, and going beyond and perfecting, moreover, the current model of

global governance to which we are resignedly trying to conform, but which is plainly incapable of addressing in effective fashion the major issues facing the planet. The establishment of that planetary level of power of government and of public administration would correct the enormous discrepancy and imbalance that exists between the nature and scope of today's problems and challenges and the political-institutional architecture that prevails on a global scale. It would mean at the same time, and in similar vein, completing the political organisation of the Earth, which already includes local, national and in some cases also supranational governments (the case of the EU) but which still lacks that necessary global level.

Introducing politics onto the global stage involves, in turn, politicising issues common to humanity, global collective assets, which means incorporating them into the global public agenda so as to, subsequently, and making use of the corresponding institutions and procedures, adopt binding decisions for world society as a whole. This is precisely what politics is: an activity directed towards the regulation of conflict and the achievement of collective objectives, resulting in the adoption of binding decisions or, in other words, of obligatory compliance for all members of the community.

The attempt to introduce politics onto the global stage involves focusing our interpretation of the world and its governability from a global and cosmopolitan perspective, in line with the actual process of globalisation and general cosmopolitanisation of the planet. From the link between cosmopolitanism and politics emerges cosmopolitics, in other words, the proposal for a new worldwide political order based on transnational or supra-state government institutions, whose subjects would be the inhabitants of the Earth as bearers of the status of citizens of the world, with corresponding rights and obligations (Peña, 2010). If we consider the existence of that world community of needs, risks and human interactions, then we should agree upon the demand for not only peaceful coexistence but also understanding and cooperation between all the people, territories and human groups that form a part of the planet. What would appear reasonable, at this point in history, is to demand the definitive ending of divisions and conflicts to permit communication, cooperation, interdependence and association-integration between all the peoples and territories of the planet.

Cosmopolitanism obliges us, therefore, to relativize the value of belonging to particular societies, to limit closed and provincial patriotism (Nussbaum, 2013) and, consequently, to consider broadening the sphere of loyalties, solidarity, moral obligations and justice (universal justice). Cosmopolitanism presents a convergence of the positions of those who, faced by the reality of transnational connections, interdependence between societies and the crossed interests that challenge conventional notions of belonging, identity and citizenship, seek a reasonable alternative to statism and to ethnocentric, isolationist and exclusive nationalism. Cosmopolitanism obliges us to rethink (reinvent) politics and policies, since in conceiving of a political order projected onto the planet as a whole, we are testing many of the basic concepts of traditional political theory (state, sovereignty, citizenship, border, human rights), as well as the concept of democracy. This is the key question facing

us here: how cosmopolitanism is going to affect the theory and practice of democracy. But what is democracy?

3 Democratic Politics

Politics includes all activities of cooperation and conflict within and between societies, activities by means of which the human species organises the use, the production and the reproduction of biological, social and economic life. Politics involves organising and planning common projects, establishing binding rules and regulations that define relationships between people and assigning resources to different human needs and aspirations, and all of this is directed, on the one hand, to satisfy the interests of citizens, with egocentric, sectorial and one-sided objectives and, on the other hand, to defending and articulating a common good and a general interest that satisfies the majority. Deutsch (1981) considers an essential element of politics to be the solid coordination of human efforts and expectations in order to achieve a society's goals; for Sodaro (2015), it is the process in which human communities pursue collective objectives and address their conflicts within the framework of a structure of rules, procedures and institutions, with the purpose of finding solutions and adopting decisions that are applicable to society as a whole.

On the basis of these premises, bearing in mind that politics is inherent to the human condition and refers to everything related to community and social life, given that politics is a collective activity directed towards conflict management, it would be neither logical nor coherent to exclude citizens and prevent them from participating in decision-making in all those spheres in which politics intervenes and manifests itself. For that very reason, politics should always be informed and participatory; in other words and expressed in clearer and more precise terms, politics (including politics on a global scale) should always be democratic. And what do we mean by "democracy"?

One of the most representative definitions is the one provided by Robert Dahl (1999), which develops a concept starting with a basic question: how is it possible in the real world to maximise popular sovereignty and political equality? One of the North American political scientist's main contributions to the theory of democracy, with its regulatory and empirical components, consists of proposing a set of five criteria in order to identify and differentiate between what is and is not the democratic process, namely, opportunities for effective participation; opportunities for what he terms "enlightened understanding", that is, the capacity to know one's own interests or assets that are at stake; control by demos or citizens/voters of the public agenda; equality of guarantees in the final vote count; and, finally, full inclusion of all in the electoral process.

For Sodaro (2015), the fundamental idea behind the concept of democracy is that all citizens have the right to determine who governs them; around this central idea, it is possible to articulate a series of advantages, purposes, virtues and contributions of the democratic fact. Thus, democracy contributes to improving quality of life and

people's dignity by allowing them to participate in community issues, express their opinions and have a say in government decisions; it provides space for individual freedom and promotes political equality according to the principle of "one citizen, one vote"; it promotes an open and permanent debate on public policies, programmes and government alternatives, while it favours pluralism and counters the influence of hegemonic and privileged organisations and groups. Finally, democracy also enables citizens to be informed with regard to their governments' activities and establish legal limits and controls in relation to the exercise of sovereign power by state powers.

Associated with the above, there has been discussion as regards the field of reference and application of the term democracy. In this sense, it is worth recalling how for some authors this is a concept that refers exclusively to the political sphere, particularly to government institutions (Sartori, 1994); for other authors, meanwhile, the level of democratisation of a political system will depend precisely upon the degree of democracy existing in those realities alien to public institutions, such as political parties, trade union organisations and civic associations (Bobbio, 1986).

One might think, in this context, that limiting democracy in the public sphere, identifying in it a merely procedural dimension, and thereby excluding its application to other spheres such as the economic, the cultural, the social, etc., seems to contradict a substantial and integral conception of democracy, regarding it as directly associated with personal dignity and with the achievement of greater socio-economic equality among citizens. Democracy would be no more than an empty set of institutions if it merely permitted citizens to vote for their representatives in institutions; accordingly, full democracy implies that people can act and influence important institutions, organisations and processes that require their energy and obedience (Young, 2002).

In line with classic Rousseauian theory, advocate of the principle of popular sovereignty and of direct participation by citizens in the labours of government, various theories have recently been formulated advocating a participatory and deliberative democracy of general scope, in other words, a democracy that propitiates participation beyond a simple periodical electoral rite. A democracy that would permit genuine self-government via a free, responsible and committed citizenry, would not assign political activity exclusively to professionals in the field (politicians) and not limit citizen participation to the simple regular exercise of their right to vote. In this respect, our representative democracies should cease to be mere election democracies – which only place people in or remove people from power – and ensure us a far more representative representation, that is, "more complex, more capable of reflecting the autonomy, the diversity and the demand for fairness of contemporary societies" (Subirats, 2011: 32).

Therefore, and as a complement to representative democracy, it is necessary, at the same time, to open channels of participatory and deliberative democracy. Representative democracy is irreplaceable today, among other reasons because it endows political activity with legitimacy, coherence, stability and necessary articulation, and because, moreover, it protects democracy itself from the immaturity, weakness, uncertainty and impatience of the citizenry (Innerarity, 2020). However,

it is also necessary to provide a channel for and exploit those other modalities of collective action – beyond political parties and traditional pressure groups – undertaken by alternative social groups and civil society and which contribute so significantly to correcting, innovating and enriching the public agenda.

All this would make it possible to recover and reinforce the agora, that public space for deliberation and rational argument, deployed upon a basis of knowledge, freedom, equal rights, non-exclusion and the absence of coercion, in which individual aspirations and problems converge and are condensed to become collective causes in search of a solution (Bauman, 2003); that space where ideas such as the public good, solidarity, civic values or the fair and open society can emerge and take shape (Popper, 1994); that space that makes it possible to re-establish the capacity to control authority and render it publically accountable, making it more ethical and transparent, or unmasking it and revealing the lies, deceit and manipulation with which authority sometimes seeks to justify its inadequacies and capitulations in the face of the prevailing economic superdeterminism (Vallespín, 2012).

In the sphere of contemporary values, democracy appears as an ethically superior and unquestionable rationality, and in this sense, we should not let ourselves be blinded by authoritarian (or techno-authoritarian) political regimes that make a show of their ability to handle with a maximum of firmness, speed and efficacy all kinds of emergencies (the claims of efficacy and efficiency are not always justified), but at the cost of treating citizens like a flock of sheep and depriving them of one of the most fundamental rights: freedom and the capacity to exercise self-determination in relation to all those questions that affect them. There is no alternative to democracy, in spite of its imperfections, obligations and shortcomings.

The concept of democratic legitimacy or, expressed in another way, of democratic legitimation of political power, is the foundation of our entire existing legal-political system and is based upon that solemn affirmation we find in almost every constitution since the First World War, and according to which sovereignty resides with the people, from whom all powers emanate. Moving thus from the absolutist model of political organisation to the constitutional and democratic model, from politics without democracy to politics with democracy, consent and self-determination of citizens. All this means that governments, institutions and political power in general have their origins and foundation in the agreement, consent and trust of the governed, and never in force, coercion, imposition or tyrannical usurpation.

In this fashion, the question of why people obey, or why obedience is demanded, must be answered by saying that this occurs because citizens grant consent and delegate power, that quota of sovereignty that corresponds to them. Citizens, as holders of a sovereign power, and given that in practice, it is impossible to exercise sovereignty directly and together, in other words, given the non-viability of direct democracy, opt for indirect and representative democracy, which thus becomes the general form of constitutional and democratic government. By means of elections, we legitimise and authenticate power, institutions and rulers, in short, the political system as a whole. Therein lie their great importance and transcendence, and hence

the fact that elections are also considered to be the central institution of representative, legitimate and democratic government (Manin, 1998).

Following this reaffirmation of the democratic fact, one should acknowledge, however, that modern democracies are facing many challenges, and some of their promises, as Bobbio would say (1986), have not been kept. Among the obstacles to the true fulfilment of the democratic ideal, which put a brake on the transit to fairer and more equitable democracies, mention should be made of the market economy that inevitably generates inequalities in terms of income and wealth and, consequently, in life, opportunities, influence and power. This is an old problem, but one that has worsened due to – among other factors – both the collapse of the socialist alternative and the sudden emergence of the process of globalisation. Another obstacle arises from the fact that politics, especially public politics, is becoming increasingly complicated and difficult to understand and administrate, which means ordinary people tend not to get involved in and distance themselves from political compromise and activity, leaving this field to the minority. The crisis of political parties also contributes directly and significantly to this weakening of popular democracy and of corresponding representative government, as Mair (2015) points out.

4 The Challenge of Finding a Cosmopolitan Democratic Model

As stated above, the attempt or the need to establish politics on the global stage involves focusing our interpretation of the world, and of its governability, from a global and cosmopolitan perspective, in line with the actual process of globalisation and general cosmopolitanisation. But this cosmopolitanism forces us to rethink or reinvent politics, as the conception of a political order projected onto the planet as a whole tests many of the basic concepts of traditional political theory and practice, among them that of democracy. As Held observes (1997, 2005), the advent of the global era makes it necessary to reassess the traditional democratic model, restricted to the sphere and confines of the nation-state, and seek a cosmopolitan democratic model. This is the great challenge and task that needs to be addressed today: designing a political and institutional model on a global scale that makes it possible, at the same time, to safeguard and put into practice the democratic principles and procedures analysed earlier.

The internationalisation and globalisation of present-day political life contribute to this democratic crisis, insofar as the capacity to control our own political agenda is now weaker and more diffuse. The gradual emergence of supranational regimes, decision-making in barely visible or transparent global or sub-global spheres or scenarios, or the functioning of a global governance based on self-proclaimed directorates and on postulates similar to that of enlightened despotism, indicate an evident deficit or failure of democratic principle and practice.

The current model of global governance clearly lacks democratic legitimacy, as it does not permit all the citizens of the planet to participate sufficiently (give their consent) with regard to the way they are governed and the people responsible for decision-making. There is no cosmopolitan democracy, that is, inclusive and open global political institutions, invested with power and legitimised by a demos and a global, participatory civil society, which reduces the credibility and popularity of existing institutions. Neither is there a clear mechanism of accountability, which makes it impossible to determine, for example, who is accountable within a set of public and private agencies and networks in which, moreover, there are no equitable criteria that regulate participation in or exclusion from the latter (Keohane, 2003). It is difficult to identify the person or people that really take decisions in today's society, or to whom these actors should report or be accountable, which makes it impossible to resolve a crucial question: how and where to relocate accountability in the global era (Lafont, 2010). We are witnessing – claims Calame (2009) – a proliferation of international regulations issued by authorities without a visible face, without a clear mandate and without an identifiable location where one can appeal or file a complaint, which undermines the authority and effectiveness of the regulation.

Other shortcomings inherent to the model of global governance are reflected, for example, in the overlapping of institutions (between the UN Security Council and the G-8 and G-20 groups), in the limited capacity of global courts of law, in the over-representation of some countries in global organisations and the under-representation of many others, or in the participation and protagonism of non-democratic regimes in international institutions. Furthermore – and this fact should be highlighted – submission to international legality depends on the will of states and on their interests, and also on the *de facto* powers that act on a global level, without the existence of any authority capable of obliging them to respect that legality, especially in the case of the strongest powers. Meanwhile, weaker states, and their respective populations, are marginalised or excluded from decision-making.

It should be acknowledged, however, that in recent years, some global institutions have improved their effectiveness and efficiency, increased their transparency and extended their mechanisms of democratic accountability. The demand for unanimity, for example, has been softened to a majority, in decisions taken by organisations such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank, or a reinforcement of deliberative elements as has occurred within the World Trade Organisation. There are also more and more agencies at a global level that exercise the typical functions of guard dogs that help to uncover corruption or are responsible for ensuring that the global public agenda includes items such as accountability, transparency or respect for human rights. This is the case, for instance, of Amnesty International, Transparency International or the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Supranationality and the globalisation of political processes constitute, therefore, a trend and an unstoppable process in the current phase of humanity, which is, at the same time, the reflection and the result of the evolution of social relations, of technological advances, of globalisation and of the growing interdependence, economic and otherwise, created in recent times. Construction of the government of the planet has already started! Furthermore, some authors do not hesitate to affirm, in

this sense, that world government is already here (even if only a world government of experts), and that the world is already being governed to all intents and purposes by global institutions that undertake different tasks related to the governability of the planet (Colomer, 2015).

All of this should be underlined and valued, and constitutes, moreover, a significant cause for optimism in that dogged endeavour to progress in the democratic governability of the planet. However, we cannot resign ourselves to this model of global governance, characterised by a serious shortage of democratic legitimacy, of authority, efficiency and decisive, binding capacity, and characterised also by a multiplicity and overlapping of institutions and entities, by dispersed, fragmented and faceless regulation, and in which dozens of bureaux, organisations, agencies, funds, banks and self-proclaimed directorates (G-8 and G-20, for example) decide upon the fate of humanity as a whole without the latter's knowledge or consent.

At this stage of human history, hardly anybody questions the fact that the process of democratisation of political institutions, and the corresponding conquest of a series of rights, practices and principles regarded as fundamental in the political sphere (citizenry, participation, representation, control, public audit and intervention, legislation, guarantees, separation of powers, etc.) have taken place in parallel to the creation and consolidation of the state itself during its democratic period. In this respect, there exists a danger of, given the unstoppable process of globalisation, with the corresponding exhaustion and erosion of the state system, a dissolution of democratic politics or, in other words, the volatilisation of fundamental rights and freedoms, the absence of constitutional guarantees, the disappearance of citizenship or the loss of public space within our societies (Bauman, 2003).

Our conversion into citizens of the world – a consequence of the process of globalisation and cosmopolitanisation of today's societies – must not lead to a new situation that condemns human beings to being citizens of nowhere, with all that the latter entails. In other words, cosmopolitanism should not occur at the cost of abandoning our status as citizens, fought for and assumed as something indisputable within the framework of the liberal, democratic state, and which renders us holders of rights that can be asserted at any time before political power or any powers of an economic or other nature. We cannot resign ourselves, with the erosion of the state institution, to losing those political spaces where in the name of justice, ethics and law, it is possible to defend our rights and freedoms and formulate our demands.

For all these reasons, and in relation to the issue raised, there is a need to design alternatives to the traditional national-state architecture of politics and of democracy itself. This creates a new scenario of complexity that has to be accepted, transcending simplistic patterns and principles that have little to do with current reality. We now need to resolve the problem of how to define and where to resituate the old categories inherent to the democratic political model, based on ethical formulae of coexistence and on the values and principles that until now have characterised the democratic, social, constitutional state of law. At this point of the exposition, we should ask ourselves what could be the solution to this democratic incongruence on a global scale.

The search for a system of global democratic governability would be, in this sense, the coherent and logical response that from a political and even a moral perspective could be given to the fact of globalisation; globalising politics and democracy, that is, taking them onto the global stage and exercising them in a similar fashion to how they have been practised in a state-national context. Globalisation, far from leading to the end of politics, should instead be understood as “the continuation of politics via new means that operate on very different levels” (Held, 2005: 34). As Innerarity says (2020: 437), although globalisation imposes many constrictions upon politics, this does not mean its end, “but maybe also the beginning of a new era for politics”.

The solution to this lack of democratic legitimacy lies in “finding new systems of government that allow for the development on a global scale of something akin to effective government that is democratically responsible for its actions” (Keane, 2008: 91). Held (2005) insists on the need to associate and unite the working environments of the creators of laws and the recipients of the latter, to open decision-making spaces to those sectors and actors that are traditionally excluded and to be able, thus, to promote new spaces for debate, proposal and political enterprise on a global scale, connecting the circles of interested parties with those responsible for taking decisions so as to, thus, “create opportunities in order that everyone may express their opinions with regard to global public assets that affect their lives” (Kaul et al., 2003: 5).

Cavallero (2009) believes that only a federative global democracy can correct the increasing democratic deficit that characterises the current system of global governance. The same idea is shared by Bradford and Linn (2010: 10), who claim that today’s system of world governance is proving itself incapable of addressing the most important challenges facing the planet, which is why it is necessary to “move from the impasse in which we find ourselves towards an international system that would make it possible to tackle global challenges by means of a more democratic, inclusive and effective global governance”. It is a question, ultimately, of “calling for the handling of global public issues to be exercised in accordance with the democratic standards that historically have been achieved at such a cost inside states, and which are now being eroded from outside” (Ibáñez, 2015: 119).

Colomer (2015: 15), and after acknowledging that “the world is currently governed by a few dozen bureaux, unions, organisations, agencies, funds, banks, courts and self-proclaimed directorates at a global level”, wonders whether these formulae and models of institutional decision-making applied on a global scale can be compatible with a valid notion of democracy. His answer is affirmative, and he reasoned by saying that democracy is only a principle and an ethical notion based on social consent, which may operate via different institutional formulae, including those applied at a global level. It is a question, therefore, of being creative and designing new formulae that allow for decision-making on a world level while respecting the “spirit” and the essence of the democratic principle and procedure.

This question has also recently been commented upon by Innerarity (2020: 430), who says that “it is unacceptable for a handful of elites from a handful of countries, and without heeding public opinion, to condition the national politics of other

countries”. However, the same author recognises that the influence of international political decisions in domestic spaces is not always an unjust interference, “but an ever more present reality that requires legitimation”; moreover, international and transnational bodies, in both the global and sub-global arena, are absolutely necessary for the management of certain issues that exceed the capacities of states. The problem is that these international institutions suffer from that infamous “democratic deficit”; in other words, they are structurally undemocratic according to the criteria and standards against which we have heretofore measured and evaluated the democratic quality of political communities.

The solution to this dilemma proposed by Innerarity (2020: 117) involves (re) thinking global (cosmopolitan) democracy via new concepts and by means of unprecedented practices, such as imagining the democracy of the future within the framework of a world and complex societies that are heading towards not separation, but towards differentiated integration. In other words, we are moving towards a system of general pluriarchy structured in multidimensional fashion and in which the logics of hierarchies and subordination no longer apply. One of today’s great challenges is, in point of fact, to design the polycentric architecture of societies at every level, from global multilateralism to local communities, “shaping a multilevel governance that integrates the citizenry according to diverse logics and without thereby preventing effective government of societies”.

Another action would be to attempt to transfer the key values of democracy to other institutional forms operating in the transnational arena, or democratise diverse functional systems or complex regimes, both global and sub-global, that are formed in areas of specific action, instead of trying to do so with the entire global system, among other reasons because some areas may be more easily democratised than others. In the new global and globalised context, where highly complex systems converge and interact (all of them characterised by contingency, functional differentiation and interdependencies), democracy has ceased to exhaust itself in the interaction with the electorate itself, and if we want to implement the democratic principle in the new scenario (in which numerous areas of competence are decoupling from the space of state and democratic responsibility), we have no choice but to advance towards a new post-territorial congruence between the authors of decisions and their destinees.

On the basis of the idea that today’s societies form a set of systems that can neither be organised hierarchically nor merge into nor delegate responsibilities to a hyperstructure, Innerarity believes that everything constructed in a positive vein for political coexistence in the twenty-first century will be in terms of recognised difference, and that neither imposition nor subordination, neither exclusion nor unilateralism, will be compatible with an advanced democratic society. Every historical period requires its own form of government, and society today, increasingly globalised and marked by a high level of complexity, requires a redefinition of the subjects of government and the ways of governing. For this reason, and bearing in mind that democracy is not immutable and that the politics currently operating in environments of extreme complexity – and supranationality – has not yet found its democratic theory, the political scientist proposes a theory of complex democracy,

considering this to be the most suitable conceptual framework in order to articulate the democratic requirements arising from the very complexity and interdependence of today's societies. This will make it possible "to formulate strategies for the government of contexts and explore the territory of what we might call an 'indirect democracy'" (Innerarity, 2020: 57).

This approach involves, among other consequences, adopting a new perspective in relation to how we should understand politics today, that is, politics as a complex system (Vallès, 2020) and acknowledging, at the same time, that it is no longer possible to take the national state as the universal model and sole reference for the exercise of politics and democracy, since these can exist under formats different to that of the nation-state. The historical model of the nation-state cannot and should not exhaust or monopolise everything related to politics and democracy, and this situates us, inexorably, in a new scenario of creativity and political and democratic experimentalism that I believe should be accepted with courage, gradualism and rigour. This does not mean, however, that the experience, the background and the vast legacy that the nation-state has given to democracy – and to politics – should be cast aside. That legacy should be suitably exploited, adapted and reinvented.

Essentially characterised by society's political and legal order, the state is the last link in the long chain of successive forms of political organisation of societies, and constitutes the most universal, complex and refined system of human association and organisation in the history of humanity. As a model of political organisation of societies, the state has contributed countless breakthroughs and improvements from both the institutional point of view and from the point of view of recognition and protection of human dignity and of the rights that stem from the latter. It has provided us with, for instance, democratic institutions and principles, fundamental rights and freedoms, constitutional guarantees, citizenship, public space, coercive systems, institutional engineering and design, separation of powers, administrative, organic and territorial organisation, etc. Some of these elements, political-administrative techniques and characteristic features of the state institution could prove very useful when it comes to constructing and articulating the political and administrative system of the Earth's democratic government.

5 Some Examples of That Democratic Experimentalism on the Global and Sub-global Stage

It is my belief that all these reflections and proposals, offered in the context of that enormous and sincere effort to find a cosmopolitan democratic model, are highly commendable and worthy of consideration; as a consequence, we should begin by designing and experimenting with (applying) on a global scale those new formulae of representation and decision-making, with the necessary adaptations and adjustments so as not to distort the essence of the democratic principle. It is time to be daring, to be entrepreneurs in the political and institutional sphere, to invent and

propose alternative models of politics, government and democracy. I shall now refer, specifically, to some examples of those democratic trials and proposals that are being witnessed at both the global and sub-global levels, showing that beyond the nation-state there can still be politics and democracy too.

5.1 The Fledgling Global Civil Society: The Seed of the Cosmopolitan Public Space

It is a verifiable fact that, for the first time in history, the collective action of the citizenry can influence political processes on a planetary scale. This is the consequence of a growing planetary awareness and of the emergence of a fledgling global civil society, formed by a set of institutions, actors and networks that extend and interact all over the planet. This global citizenship transcends national borders and presupposes a willingness to live together and tackle in a spirit of solidarity the challenges facing our species.

Since the symbolic date of 1989, and the chain of revolutions that contributed to the fall of the Berlin Wall and to the end of the Cold War, we have witnessed the spread of the mobilising practices of so-called global civil society. In 1999, in the city of Seattle (USA), there were major demonstrations under the democratically inspired banner “No Globalization without Representation”; in 2003, millions of citizens, drawn together by the slogan “United for Peace and Justice”, demonstrated on every continent against the invasion of Iraq. To which should be added, among other mobilisations, the relative success of the “alterglobalisation” movement embodied by the World Social Forum, or the so-called “Arab Spring” with its multiple demonstrations and protest movements that affected several Arab nations (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria) and have led in some cases to the fall and overthrow of various governments or political regimes.

With the invaluable backing of new technologies, many other demonstrations continue to take place at a global level, evidencing that growing and persistent planetary civic awareness. The celebration in recent years of International Women’s Day (8 March) is proving to be another indisputable demonstration not only of the strength acquired by the feminist movement on an international scale, but also of that growing and expansive collective action of mobilisation and protest all over the planet. Recently there have been increasingly frequent and intense mass demonstrations by thousands of young people in cities right across the world, in protest against government inaction with regard to the environmental crisis and, in particular, everything related to climate change.

This global collective action has shown that the planet’s citizens have begun to realise that, through mobilisation and pressure, the course of history can be altered or even controlled by global society as a whole. This global collective action symbolises, moreover, the shift towards a fledgling global civil society, which Keane (2008: 8) defines as a dynamic non-governmental system of institutions, actors,

networks and socio-economic conglomerates “that straddle the whole earth... and whose peaceful or ‘civil’ effects are felt everywhere...from local areas...to the planetary level itself”.

This global citizenship, despite including and integrating a plurality of diverse actors governed by different cultures, laws and codes, represents the embryonic articulation of a *demos* that embodies the “cosmopolitan counterweight” (Beck, 2005) that transcends national borders. It also represents the seed of that global public space or arena, understood as an institutionalised sphere of discourse, response and action organised on a global scale – a sphere that legitimises processes of international society and makes it possible to “exercise shared responsibility in the protection of public interests and assets of the world community” (Rodrigo, 2016: 39).

This awareness and this political momentum on the part of global citizenship are a basic prerequisite for the democratisation of the emerging social order, for the formation of a system of global government and “for a redefinition of the universal rights and duties of the peoples of the world, crossing all borders” (Keane, 2008: 8). Moreover, this global civil society, through the multiple spheres and public spaces in which it is formed, helps to uncover corrupt business dealings, contributes to solving the problem of “there appears to be nobody in charge”, fosters the belief that alternatives exist, and is responsible for the inclusion in the public agenda of issues such as democratic representation, accountability, legitimacy, respect for human rights or defence of the interests and public assets of humanity.

These processes of global collective action, increasingly frequent and widespread all over the world, can be boosted by that new fledgling social class, that society, interconnected and active on social networks, which understands neither borders nor geopolitical or identity-based divides, and which Mason terms (2016) “universal educated citizens”. They represent and are, in turn, a good representation of, that growing process of global miscegenation, a circumstance that will also contribute to the gradual articulation of that awareness and planetary democratic action. As Trent (2007) observes, it is global civil society, far-removed from any connotations of anarchy, that should take a step forward, mobilise all its potential and acquire special protagonism at this crucial time, exerting pressure, obliging governments to act, participating in and legitimising this entire reform process that seeks to provide the planet with a system of democratic government.

5.2 The Proposals of the World Federalist Movement

The World Federalist Movement, with a long history and presence on the international stage, has been monitoring this question closely in recent decades, and it is worth taking into account its various studies, reports and proposals on the subject. On the assumption that the establishment of a cosmopolitan democracy, in other words, a democratic government of the planet, cannot occur overnight, but requires time and will probably need to take place over various stages, federalists suggest

that the initial phase should be the creation of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA). The main reason for this proposal is the fact that, in the context of purest democratic logic, parliament is the core, central institution par excellence and the source of legitimacy upon which any system of democratic government should be based. This assembly would constitute the starting point and the driving force and guide in this gradual process of the creation of the global democratic government of the future.

This proposal was launched in 2007, and since then has been widely endorsed by numerous individuals and institutions belonging to civil society organisations, national and international parliaments or political party networks from over 150 countries. It is worth highlighting, in this respect, the important resolutions in support of this proposal adopted by the European Parliament, the Pan-African Parliament, the Latin American Parliament, the Socialist International, the Liberal International, the Global Green Congress, etc. All these resolutions underline the urgent need to provide the planet with a system of governance in line with the challenges posed, and without abandoning at the same time democratic principles and procedures.

As Bummel (2017) explains, the UNPA could essentially be – and in a preliminary phase – an advisory body of a subsidiary nature created by the UN General Assembly and initially formed by national parliaments. Its powers, and its legitimacy, would gradually increase over time, as was the case with the European Parliament. It should be recalled, in this respect, that the latter evolved over different stages; having begun as a Common Assembly created in 1952 (which indirectly represented the peoples of member states via delegates elected by the respective national parliaments, and with essentially advisory and supervisory, but non-legislative, powers), 5 years later, it became the European Parliament (with increased competencies, assuming, among others, budgetary control of the European Communities), before finally achieving, in 1979, direct election of its members and a substantial extension of its competencies.

Nowadays, the European Parliament, along with the Council, serves as the EU's legislative organ and is increasingly influential in the Union's entire political process. To the Parliament corresponds that function of utmost significance within any democratic organisation: political representation, control and legitimisation, in addition to its budgetary and advisory functions, the appointment of senior officials, etc. As Bummel suggests, the UNPA could fulfil a similar role to the European Parliament, but at a global level.

Following the example of the European Parliament, and according to the federal collective's proposal, the members of the UNPA would not be assembled as a function of their national origin, but would be organised into transnational groups on the basis of different existing political-ideological positions (Conservatives, Socialists, Liberals, Greens, etc.). This assembly would initially be formed of national MPs, and its members would later be directly elected by citizens. Its competencies would also be adopted gradually and progressively, from informative and advisory functions to genuine parliamentary functions of representation, legislation, legitimisation and control.

In a similar vein, it should be noted that in 2015, and coinciding with the United Nations' 70th anniversary, the Commission on Global Security, Justice and Governance published a report with 80 recommendations aimed at correcting and countering the state of crisis affecting global governance. Among the most significant conclusions and recommendations were various proposals such as the need to create a UN parliamentary network that would make it possible not only to improve the organisation's transparency and knowledge throughout the world, but would also enable national parliaments and civil society itself to participate in its tasks, thus propitiating the beginnings of a transnational democratic culture that could influence decision-making at a global level.

5.3 The Reference of the European Union

The aforementioned references show that in this complicated task of finding the most appropriate form of democracy to be implemented on a global scale, we should take advantage of and adapt recent and innovative models and experiences of political organisation that have been experimented with relative success. This is the case, for example, of the European Union, which can offer important lessons regarding the governability of societies on a supranational scale.

The EU is one of today's most representative examples of regional integration, an experience whose characteristics and successes make it a reference not only for other processes of continental or sub-global regionalisation, but also for the very process of global integration. The EU is a special and unprecedented case (both in terms of method and the result achieved) of suprastate integration; a work in constant evolution and constructed via processes of trial and error; a novel, innovative, daring polity, in line with the new times and moving in the direction set by the evolution of humanity; a political laboratory where great debates take place and new models of governability of societies are experimented with; a case of reconversion and redefinition of the state institution, evidencing the fact that the state-nation does not have a monopoly on the forms of political organisation of human societies.

The EU is also a complex and pluriarchic model of government, without one single centre, where politics moves from hierarchy to heterarchy and where governing involves administering heterogeneity; a major meeting point and scenario of dialogue and negotiation between a variety of actors representing a plural and complex society; a space of tolerance, respect for human rights and the capacity to recognise new emerging actors (regions, Euroregions, minorities). The process of European construction will ultimately represent that perspective of reconciliation, rapprochement and federal unity of the old continent in which more blood has been spilt per square metre than in any corner of the planet.

A pioneer in the process of the creation of the nation-state, today's Europe is setting the path for a review of the latter, which is why the political experiment that is the EU is the object of all kinds of descriptions: post-state society, metanation, post-modern society (Cooper, 2005) or model of multilevel governance (Morata, 2004).

This Europe, characterised thus and in spite of its shortcomings and weaknesses, brings value and a very powerful and encouraging demonstrative argument when it comes to underpinning the proposal for a democratic government of the planet: there is life beyond the state, and it is possible, in spite of the many difficulties that exist, to transcend prevailing statism and invent new models of democratic political organisation in line with new times and needs.

The EU is an undisputed, though improbable, model of supranational organisation-integration, increasingly close to the parameters characteristic of a democratic, federal organisation. This is because, among other factors and defining features, the common institutions of the EU evince a clear independence from the member states; the laws that emanate from these institutions are based on direct or indirect legitimacy granted by popular sovereignty and are of a binding nature for states and citizens; there are direct relations between EU institutions and laws and the citizens of the entire Union; moreover, decision-making in a series of important areas – the number of which is steadily increasing – is based on majority criteria, rather than the unanimity rule; and finally, there is an explicit and precise assignment of competencies to the EU, both exclusive and shared.

That Europe, which in the twentieth century was the main theatre for the two most terrible and devastating Cosmopolitan wars in history, now constitutes the supreme experiment of reconciliation and construction of the ideal of lasting peace and represents the trial version of what could be a future cosmopolitan order. History demonstrates that the political unification-federation of societies has taken place via concentric circles and over successive phases, and that federative processes are contagious. For this reason, it may be argued that “the process of European integration, far from hindering or contradicting the global project, will contribute to its reinforcement and acceleration by acting as an example and stimulus for other processes of continental integration initiated in other regions of the planet that will eventually converge in a future worldwide integration” (Rojo Salgado, 1996: 11).

The European experience can definitely provide us with the new model of political organisation required by the planet, courtesy of its innovative and multiple experiences of suprastate integration, of intrastate decentralisation, of cross-border cooperation-integration, of multilevel governance and its commitment to multilateralism, consensus, dialogue and respect for human rights (Rojo Salgado & Varela, 2016). As a case study of institutional innovation, of administration and constitutionalisation of transnational laws, of shared sovereignty and of shaping of a post-national demos, the EU can show us the direction that should be taken by a cosmopolitan democratic governance (Habermas, 2012). This is how, ultimately, and in this context of reconciliation, integration and political and institutional innovation, this Europe will truly be able to lead the twenty-first century (Leonard, 2006).

To a large extent, the EU is already functioning in accordance with the parameters and logic of multilevel governance, characterised by interactive sociopolitical forms of government; by a highly complex and labyrinthine political process (clear evidence of which are the countless advisory committees and work groups within the Union’s main institutions); and by the presence of the numerous and diverse actors involved, both public and private, at different levels, who seek to coordinate

their efforts and share their resources (cognitive, technical, financial media, institutional) with a view to the functional resolution of problems and the creation of opportunities in this new suprastate context. A procedure, moreover, which, by its very nature, facilitates the presence of diverse mechanisms of equilibrium, checks and balances when it comes to making decisions.

The idea of governance, as relational government, is also associated with the concept of network, revealing a scenario consisting of different actors interrelated via a network, forming reticular structures to negotiate and commit to certain policies and their implementation. The network means that a plurality of actors, who represent, in turn, multiple organisations and interests, interact, mediate and share information and resources, facilitating proximity (reconciliation, on occasions), negotiation and compromise between the different parties involved. As far as the European arena is concerned, the proliferation of multiple and extensive networks that represent a myriad of interests, groups and agencies, both public and private, is already an established reality, and Brussels, the EU capital, is the epicentre of this giant mesh that is being woven (Morata, 2004).

Hundreds of organisations have their offices in Brussels, in order not only to defend their respective interests before the Union's principal decision-makers, but also to interact among themselves so as to facilitate the attainment of shared objectives. The Commission, the European Parliament and the Council, without abandoning their political role, seek to involve relevant public and private actors, promoting and fostering agencies and mechanisms of participation and consultation, via, for example, extensive comitology, fora and advisory bodies, facilitating that co-governance, that open governance, that participatory democracy, which makes it possible to share resources, information, knowledge, perspectives and, most importantly, negotiate, commit to and assume joint responsibility for specific policies and their implementation.

The practice of governance in the European arena makes it possible to replace a predominantly linear and vertical model, in which political decisions are taken at the top or from a hierarchical centre, with a kind of virtuous circle, based on plural and multilevel participation, negotiation and interaction between the actors and networks involved, and throughout the entire process, from the formulation of policies to their implementation and subsequent evaluation. In short, the experience and the results obtained over these 70 years show that the singular method of European construction has proven its viability and effectiveness in a case of supranational integration. For this reason, closely following the European path, with the necessary improvements and adaptations to the global scenario, could be a convenient option in this immense and commendable task of equipping our planet Earth with a democratic government.

6 Conclusion

Given the existence today of those necessary and sufficient conditions for the emergence and establishment on a global scale of the sphere and practice of politics and given, in turn, that this global politics should not abandon one of its main conquests and most defining features, which is its democratic dimension, in this study, I have attempted to raise the issue of the challenge of finding a cosmopolitan democratic model. In answer to the question of what democracy can be practised on a global level, various ideas, proposals and experiences have been analysed and explored (from complex democracy to multilevel governance, via representative, participatory and deliberative democracy).

I believe that some or all these ideas, proposals and experiences may be of some use in relation to this commendable and enormous challenge of finding a cosmopolitan democratic model based on that cardinal and essential premise of all democratic construction, according to which governments, institutions and political power in general must be based on the agreement, consent and trust of those governed, and never on force, coercion, imposition or tyrannical usurpation.

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Part I
The Tensions Generated by the Neo-liberal
Attempt to Domesticate Democracy, at
State and Global Level

The Neoliberal Commercialisation of Citizen Participation in Spain



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and Igor Ahedo Gurrutxaga 

Abstract In view of the *global participatory turn* that is occurring in Western democracies, this chapter aims to ascertain the particular form that this turn takes in Spain. To this end, a genetic analysis of the institutionalisation of citizen participation in the country, between 1978 and 2017, is carried out. This analysis reveals the neoliberal trend of the participatory turn as it has taken place in Spain. The text describes three movements that make up the diagnosis of the neoliberal participatory turn: (1) the naturalisation of a *topos* with a mechanistic nature of democratic crisis, (2) the neoliberal bureaucratisation of participation and (3) the privatisation of participation. The general lines of the three movements are explained, and the particular analysis of the third of them, the neoliberal commercialisation of citizen participation, is described.

Keywords Public action in participation · Global participatory turn · Neoliberalism · Participatory democracy · Crisis of democracy

1 Introduction

It has apparently never been as easy as it is today, at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, to intervene in public action through participation and/or deliberation. The rise of participatory products seems to indicate an interest in having citizens add their proposals and ideas to the definition of public affairs. However, in this text, we consider the possibility that we are facing a merely apparent reality, and we are inclined to reply affirmatively, but with reservations, to Baiocchi and Ganuza's question (2017: 7): "Participation is the buzzword of the neoliberal era?"

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In this chapter, we maintain that Spain has witnessed a neoliberal participatory turn (NPT), since 2010. From that time onwards, the increase in the production of legislative texts on citizen participation is joined by the spread of the procedure of outsourcing participation in public authorities (Martínez-Palacios, 2019). Therefore, the NPT is a diagnosis that summarises a reality: that public efforts regarding participation, if they are mediated by the private codes of the New Public Management (NPM) kind, contrary to what they say, end up oriented towards the organisation of a lack of interest and awareness, politically speaking, among citizens. Put another way, participation is used to naturalise a policy of indifference towards public policy. The basis of this diagnosis (see Sect. 4) is the study of the institutionalisation of *public action* in participation in Spain between 1978 and 2017 from a genetic viewpoint.¹ In accordance with the sociology of public action, studying public action brings with it the obligation to analyse the “socio-politically constructed space, both through techniques and instruments, and through the goals, content and projects of different actors” (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2005: 12).

In the early years of the first decade of the twenty-first century, a reflection began on concepts such as “industry”, “engineering”, “market” and “company” in relation to participation (Nonjon, 2005; Lee, 2015; Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017). These terms describe the unexpected effects of the spread of the dynamics of participation to all social fields,² derived from the incorporation of the discourse and dynamics of participation into the economic, media, administrative, bureaucratic and political fields, which broadens the area of study in the analysis of participatory democracy. If, up until now, studies have focussed on documenting devices and experiences or on studying the material conditions and politics of participation and its effects, with the spread of participative practices, new problems arise, such as the professionalisation of participation (Nonjon, 2005), the standardisation of democratisation (Lee, 2015) and the introduction of market criteria into the public management of participation (Hendriks & Carson, 2008; Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017), among others. These issues bear witness to the emergence of a participation industry, with new practices and dynamics involving internationalisation; hence the terms “participatory turn” (Bherer et al., 2017), “tournoi participatif” (Mazeaud & Nonjon, 2018) and “participative wende” (Hüller, 2010) cover problems linked to the engineering of participation on a global scale.

The global participatory turn (understood as the spread of participatory practices and the consequent verification of the existence of a participatory industry, engineering or even market) is a multiscale phenomenon that is being increasingly documented in the academic field (Ganuza & Fernández, 2012; Mazeaud & Nonjon, 2018; Bherer et al., 2017; Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017) and that is structured based on the historical, material and symbolic logics and conditions of possibility of each

¹This study was carried out between 2016 and 2019, and was the research presented as Jone Martínez Palacios’ application, TUC8/1-D00110–11, to become an Assigned University Lecturer.

²In the text we refer to the Bourdian notion of field, broadly defined as a social space in which social agents strive to obtain and accumulate rare goods, that is to say, the different forms in which capital is expressed (Bourdieu, 1966, 1999, 2013, and others).

moment and context. Specifically, the turn does not take the same form in France, whose republican participative tradition pervades participatory products (Mazeaud & Nonjon, 2018), and in Spain, where “council democracy” (Ganuza, 2010) connects with the deliberative preference based on the patronage practices of Spanish political culture (Ramíó, 2016). Therefore, it is necessary to document both the particular and general dynamics of this turn in order to understand the internal (local, national, state, etc.) and external (international) dynamics and, above all, the overlaps between them, which are what explain their movements.

The work we present seeks to document, analyse and study the consequences of the turn. To do so, the institutionalisation of participation being one of the elements common to the participatory turn everywhere from 2016 to 2019, the study looked at the institutionalisation of the public action of participation in Spain between 1978 and 2017. The material analysed (see Table 1) makes it possible to state that the turn in Spain has been of a neoliberal kind.

We are aware that we are using the term neoliberal when its power to explain seems to be more politicised and questioned than ever (Slobodian, 2018). Neoliberalism covers a range of projects and schools (Ahedo & Telleria, 2020), which makes this concept a category that is sometimes too abstract, one that is recurrently used to describe the way in which public action works in capitalist systems during a specific stage.

Table 1 Summary of the empirical material analysed

Participatory products relating to the discourse on participation (what is <i>said</i> about participation)
129 speeches about CP in the lower house of the Spanish Parliament from 1978 to 2017 14 speeches for the inauguration of the presidency of the government, given from 1978 to 2017
Participatory products relating to the regulation and standardisation of participation (what is done to <i>regulate</i> participation)
76 legal texts about participation 72 guides and manuals on participation written and published by Spanish institutions indicating how to carry out a participatory process
Participatory products that have been effectively implemented (what has been <i>done</i> about participation)
67 training programmes proposed under the umbrella of one of the 19 federations of Spanish municipalities 12 public job vacancies for the post of PT 9 job descriptions regarding PT jobs in municipalities that stand out for their participatory policies Websites, lists of services and reports from 96 Spanish consultancies and research groups on the subject of CP, offering services of this kind to public authorities 8 Master’s programmes on participation at academic institutions in Spain 22 conference programmes on politics and sociology run in Spain. These subjects include the majority of the intellectual activity of participation in the academic field

Source: Martínez-Palacios (2019)

PT Participation Technician, CP Citizen Participation

For our consideration of this operational logic of financialised capitalism, this text is based on the studies of critical theory. From this perspective, talking about neoliberalism necessarily involves a view of capitalism that avoids a teleological understanding of it. For this, based on Marxian theses and supported by essential reading on the subject by Harvey (2014), Hibou (2012), Nancy Fraser and Rachel Jaeggi (2019: 32) and Wendy Brown (2015), we would like to characterise capitalism as “a path-dependent sequence of accumulation regimes that unfolds diachronically in history” (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2019: 71). The characteristic thing about financialised capitalism is that its logic is a neoliberal one that “authorises finance capital to discipline states and publics in the immediate interests of private investors” (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2019: 84) and that, furthermore, it does so by exercising the “use of the force of law” to maintain the status quo (Slobodian, 2018). In this regard, following Brown (2015), the neoliberal project aims to dismantle democratisation processes and to commercialise public action by installing markets and ethical principles in their place (2015: 108), diluting, through the law and the monetarisation of daily life, the weight of *habitus* in favour of *ethos*. At the level of the particular, following Hibou (2012), neoliberalism is characterised by the expansion of legal systems, multiplying the number of regulatory texts, assuming the ordoliberal perspective that works to put up an impenetrable mesh to defend the market from any interference (Ahedo & Telleria, 2020) in order to, at the same time, open up the decision-making process regarding the norms of public action to business agents. All this ends up in a normative articulation of a moral kind that sketches out the dispositions of a subject in a way that fits into the “fantasy of individuality” (2012); in a new spirit of capitalism (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002), market-based logic lands in the everyday, assimilating into itself, as natural, inequalities, competition and aggression to the same degree that the market defines itself as a processing mechanism for guaranteeing the efficiency of government (Mirowski, 2009). Ultimately, the key to neoliberalism is in the way that it situates the political, orienting it, on the one hand, towards the establishment of hard and fast legal and governmental guarantees for unfettered competition and private property, and, on the other hand, to incorporate the market’s competitive and individualistic logics into life (Ahedo & Telleria, 2020). Therefore, it is more appropriate to interpret neoliberalism as an “art of government” (Colmenero, 2019) than as an individualistic ideology or a programme for reducing the state. Ultimately, Hayek’s utopia (Vergara, 2015) can be encapsulated in Margaret Thatcher’s statement that her goal was to “win souls”.

Based on the empirical analysis carried out, this chapter maintains that there are three movements which characterise the neoliberal participatory turn in Spain that allows the entrance of private companies with private interests into the State’s decision-making through participative devices, with a resulting impoverishment of democracy. The three movements are: (1) the naturalisation of a *topos* of the crisis of democracy, which is taken on by private companies and used to sell participatory products via formulas such as outsourcing; (2) the neoliberal bureaucratisation of participation, which channels the New Public Management values, which in general

orient private companies; and (3) the privatisation and commercialisation of participation, which means that this is converted into a saleable product oriented towards the accumulation of capital in any of its forms (economic, social, cultural, symbolic).

The main goal of this chapter is not to offer the complete thesis regarding the NPT in a detailed way, but rather to examine one of its movements, the third one, which gives the chapter its title. However, we consider it important to present a basic outline linking the three movements.

So this chapter is divided into five sections. After this introductory framework, in the second methodological section, we explain what is meant by the analysis' genetic approach, and we set out the empirical material that forms the basis for a definition of the three movements. The third section offers a general description of the diagnosis of the NPT. We briefly introduce the first and second movements in order to then cover the interrelationship in which they appear with the practice of the commercialisation of citizen participation. In the fourth section, due to the relevance of the debate about the commercialisation of public and political life (Brown, 2015), the increase in studies of the relationship between market and participation (Mazeaud & Nonjon, 2018), and the context of the institutionalisation of public policies through regulation that is occurring in the Spanish Autonomous Regions, we look at the possibilities and dangers that commercialisation has for participatory public action. In the last section, we take up once again the study's principal ideas, and we offer a series of thoughts that can be looked at in greater depth.

2 Studying the Institutionalisation of Citizen Participation in Spain (1978–2017): Methodology and Empirical Material

With the aim of understanding the meaning of the participative turn in Spain, we study the institutionalisation of participation between 1978 and 2017. To do this, we analyse public action as it relates to participation using a genetic structuralist approach, inspired by the work of Bourdieu (1993; 2014, among others), looking in depth at the production of power relations among agents through the study of field logics. This leads to an analysis, with a socio-historical approach, of the social position of the agents who produce participation services and the emergence of the contents and nature of the citizen participation products offered in the political field.

Thus, we study the genesis of what has been naturalised (participatory products on Table 1), studying their production process and identifying the position of the agents who produce discourses, legal documents and participatory devices and the relationship among those agents in the overall field of power (political, economic, etc.) as well as the power relations and interactions among these agents during the production process.

This genetic approach assumes that, in order to know what is happening, it is necessary not only to look at the composition of a (participative) field but also to attend to the movement from its origin.

It has already been pointed out that the participatory turn is characterised by the inflation of participatory products. Given that it is not possible to study them all, for the purposes of this text, we chose to select the principal political instruments used in order to create and maintain institutions according to the criteria indicated by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) in their studies of the work of government and its institutions: laws, discourses of state, advisory documents, theorisation, routinisation, promotion and definition of categories and products that make it possible for these institutions to be reproduced in different places. This is a sample that includes discursive, legal and practical milestones in the implementation of participation obtained from consultation with experts (academic agents, participation technicians and participation consultants), regulatory documentation that constitutes the legal framework for participation in Spain, as well as the services offered by the main agents that offer participation products in Spain.

To summarise, with the genetic approach, we make these products “talk”, in a systematised way (Martínez-Palacios, 2019: methodological annexes), about the principles of vision and division that organise them.

The diagnosis of the NPT that we introduce in the following section comes from the study of the set of public products in Table 1. The identification of the first movement focusses on the discourse on participation; the identification of the second movement on legal texts, guides and manuals on participation; and the commercialisation of participation focuses on the products effectively implemented in participative procedures (see Sect. 4).

3 The Neoliberal Participatory Turn

The first movement of the neoliberal participatory turn in Spain is related to the production and naturalisation of the *topos* of the crisis in democracy, which introduces a systemic view of the world in which participation is presented and understood as a medical-style solution (participation as therapy). This first movement consists of the use of the discourse of the democratic crisis as a “common place, that can be argued with, but cannot be argued about”, as *topos* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1998: 109).

So, on the one hand, the *topos* of the crisis that is present in the political and economic fields makes it possible for economic and business agents to sell products that until now have not been of interest in participatory democracy (e.g. private companies dedicated to telephone services, or consultancies without a particular specialisation in participatory material) in such a way that, given the neoliberal viewpoint indicated, economic corporations reformulate democratisation from the logic of private economic interests (Brown, 2015).

By way of illustration, it is possible to point to the example of the spin-off, Scytll. This company, which specialises in electoral modernisation, is linked to Telefónica S.A., and in 2016, it created a subsidiary in the form of a private limited company (Open Séneca) that operates what the company calls a “platform”, offering

consultancy: “Civicit: Experts in citizen participation”. Civicit offers services and operations related to “participatory processes” to councils such as Logroño, Narón and Granollers, and facilitates participatory budgets in Lloret de Mar and Lleida.

ScytI has become the global leader in the electoral modernisation market and we now see the opportunity to do the same in the space of participatory democracy, a market that we believe is sufficiently mature for new solutions. (statement by Pere Vallès, CEO of ScytI, in *eleconomista.es*. 24/02/2016)

In this same presentation, the Global Manager of Telefónica Open Future makes use of the discourse of the crisis to sell its product when she points out that:

Currently, the communication of governments with their citizens is limited in most cases to the electoral process that occurs every four years, something that is insufficient for the new generations of citizens who demand that they be listened to in the decisions that affect their day-to-day lives, and request tools that allow them to interact with their politicians. (Ana Segurado, Global Manager of Telefónica Open Future, *eleconomista.es*. 24/02/2016)

Apart from the fact that the terrain of the democratic crisis opens the way for the entry of business agents, what is happening is that a circular sequence regarding the implementation of democratisation is naturalised, one that favours a medicalisation of participation. The content and origins of this crisis are not spoken about; what is mentioned is the existence of a “crisis of democracy”, “of democratic efficiency”, “of citizen confidence”, etc. for which it is necessary to take participatory measures, all without putting at risk the representative system and the work of the political parties. Those who propose participation (political parties and companies) do so setting a limit at guaranteeing the maintenance of their own existence, giving rise to a “participatory bias” (Navarro, 1999).

This systemic notion of crisis causes an unfolding of a range of institutional participatory services that results in a dispersion of deliberative and participative devices, which have little relationship with each other but which create an appearance of possibility (in the intervention of the decision). To give coherence to this dispersion, devices are presented as being part of a “system” (system of institutional participation) or a common “regime” (of institutional participation). Both ideas (system and regime) are favourable to a systemic view of the world that links up with the mechanistic *topos* of the crisis in democracy while also fitting in with the regulatory drive that neoliberalism uses to maintain a state of affairs that is advantageous to agents with an accumulation of global capital (Brown, 2015; Slobodian, 2018; Fraser & Jaeggi, 2019).

The second movement is related to the neoliberal bureaucratisation of participation, which is essential in order to understand the organised lack of interest created by the neoliberal turn. Considering that in Spain, much of the public action in participation has been channelled through regulatory projects (laws, regulations, etc.) (Navarro, 1999; Ganuza, 2010), it can be seen that in the seven practices given below, there is a new bureaucratic rationalisation that is made specific in the normalisation of instruments affecting ethics and dispositions and the resulting entry of bureaucracy into the private sphere, both matters that are characteristic of a neoliberal logic of managing what is public (Hibou, 2012). Following Brown (2015: 151),

the legal framework becomes a medium for disseminating neoliberal rationality applied by private companies. Specifically, the seven particular practices of a new bureaucratic rationalisation are (1) a greater tendency towards the standardisation of a monosemous way of understanding participation, (2) the greater presence of methods for channelling rationalisation, (3) more legal procedures, (4) the integration and naturalisation of formulas for the abstraction and objectification of participation, (5) the individualisation of participative practice and the rupture of community logics, (6) the normalisation of devices that cover morals and dispositions and (7) the elitist professionalisation of participation.

The third movement that gives the participatory turn in Spain a neoliberal character is related to the commercialisation and progressive privatisation of public action, which arises, partly, from the authorities' willingness to debureaucratise and the appearance of NPM, which results in a new legal framework with a strongly moralising content (Brown, 2015). In Spain, given the discourse of the crisis in democracy and bureaucracy, for which a need for citizen participation is seen, institutional participatory services have shown, from the first decade of the twenty-first century, an accumulative management whose goal is profit, both politically and economically speaking, as well as an increase in devices in favour of competition. At this time, it is possible to talk about the configuration of a "social market in participation" and a "neoliberal market in participation" (Martínez-Palacios, 2019). The first is guided by the principles of fair commerce; the second is based on the idea that participation can and should be sold as a good for making money. Therefore, this movement is characterised by a change from an artisan approach to participation to the industry of citizen participation, something that has been mentioned by other authors (Mazeaud & Nonjon, 2018).

4 The Commercialisation of Citizen Participation

There have been many debates dealing with the practice of outsourcing, but of them all, the one about what and how far to outsource stands out, for the implications it has in terms of moving towards an empty state. The question is, where should the limits of outsourcing be? The reply to this question provides not only information about the NPM model applied by a public authority but also information about the state model and its orientation in the defence of public rights based on practices that outsource core activities or those belonging to the strategic nucleus related to the State's authority and secondary activities, which derive from the political outcomes of the first, which can be provided by an external agent.

Public participatory services include a series of actions related to the central activities of authorities (legislating, taxation, development, etc.) and others that do not compromise the nature of the State. The key matter today is to ascertain whether the authorities' activities that are being outsourced touch the core and also to ascertain the way in which hiring one, or other, kind of agent (public limited companies, cooperatives, research centres) affects the way the result is monitored as well as

how this affects the consolidation of the CP services markets. That is to say, it is necessary to understand how the State is built up through public action in participation by means of an instrument whose origin is found in the search for business efficiency.

In theory, the uses of outsourcing can be explained by many factors: a search for profit, savings, citing efficiency and quality in public provision, a technical deficit in terms of provision, etc. With regard to public action in participation, there are jobs that require resources, personnel and the impulse of the triggering of the participatory imperative that is deduced from the “legal framework of participation” (Salvador & Ramió, 2012; FEMP, 2015). This need, which is not only technical but also related to the acquisition of political commitments, is in fact responding with a strengthening of discourse on the subject in the political field as well as a regulatory impulse. Both discourse and regulation are core state activities. The actions that result from this central activity (training, dynamisation, etc.) are already being outsourced or only partially provided by public authorities. The fact that there are few job descriptions and new jobs for technical participation agents, while there is an increase in companies that, in different ways, offer participation services, gives an idea of how well established this phenomenon is in Spain.

In general, with a more or less defined political mandate, companies carry out areas of public action that range from running workshops that have been designed by technical municipal agents, which respond to a reflexive and political strategy, to complete coverage of the practice that might be activated after making a statement of the “we want to do something in terms of participation” kind. In accordance with Fraser (2008), the logics that are induced by market discipline, the short timescales defended, based on a search for effectiveness, and the significant presence of temporary jobs are affecting the target dimension of governability, something that is happening internationally in the form of the outsourcing of participatory democracy in countries such as Taiwan (Poe Yu-Ze Wan, 2018), where the institutionalisation of participation involves a systematic channelling of participative budgets, outsourced to associations, NGOs and academics, which causes a boom, such as the one that took place in the country in 2015. This is accompanied by a State that distances itself from the procedure and only intervenes at the beginning (designing the budget). The increase in both suppliers and in the competitiveness of companies reinforces a relation of dependence and clientelism that acts in detriment to a logic based on empowerment and in favour of a kind of participatory coaching. In other words, companies compete, not to offer the best participation service, but to offer the best service for controlling results through participation. According to the author’s results, this coaching leads to the “destruction of a public ethos” at the cost of an increase in a commercial logic, according to which “the lowest bidder wins the project, a clear self-exploitation of workers occurs and projects, for which there are not enough resources, are competed for” (2018: 10–12).

In addition to this scenario, which shows that public participation services are becoming a political procedure oriented towards the accumulation of legitimacy, there is an established ethos in terms of aggressive competition, the precarity of a group and the dissolution of any projects that cannot be located in the productivist

accumulative logic. Although Spain is not in Taiwan's situation, the phenomenon of outsourcing is nonetheless well established, and its consequences need to be studied in order to avoid a radicalisation of the NPT.

To this end, we provide an analysis of the services offered by the agents which can be hired by authorities for participation purposes. By analysing the nature of and the services provided by 96 consultancy companies, we hope to offer a sketch of the outsourcing phenomenon. However, there are many more companies and agents than have been found in this research, and so we insist on all possible caution given the clear limits of the sample. As a reference point with respect to the limits we are working with, in an investigation that shows considerable similarities to the one presented here, the Mazeaud and Nonjon team identified in France around 226 consultancy companies (or similar) from the CP world, up to 2015. In fact, in their study of the French participation market, the authors use the term "*nébuleuse*" ("nebula" or "nebulous") (2018: 175) to describe "the variety of profiles and practices" presented and carried out by these consultancies. Both of these characteristics, with certain nuances, are the starting point for a description of consultancy work in Spain.

With regard to the first, in the case of Spain, the metaphor of the *nébuleuse* is very revealing. Here we take on the concept as understood as halfway between a lax approach, such as diversification, and the sense used by Cox (1987), as a managerial structure of academic agents, corporations and authorities oriented towards achieving a political consensus favourable to global capitalism.

This intermediate use of the notion of "*nébuleuse*" helps us to characterise the reality involved in the practice of outsourcing participation in Spain. Specifically, we consider that we are faced with a reality in which there is a comprehensive difficulty due to the dark nature implied by the different understandings of the notion of "*nébuleuse*".

The casuistry inhabited by the agents that offer CP services is very diverse: from some that were founded between 1960 and 1990 and which since the year 2000 have offered CP services, to single-person coaching and consultancy companies created since 2001 by former managers, and secretaries of public authorities who coach authorities because when leaving they take with them the authority's list of contacts. It is also possible to find small cooperatives that are critical of the neoliberal discourse, research groups created between 1990 and 2000 that focus on participatory democracy and "catch all" companies, among other cases.

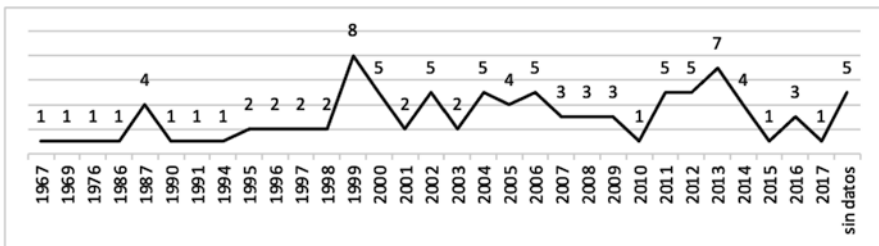
With regard to the services offered, it is possible to find everything from those that cover the management of grants to the design of participatory budgets. This complexity covers the existence of consultancy companies that specialise in CP services and whose existence and activity is dedicated to this, as well as others that offer participation among other products, including market consultancy, the design of documents that are not related to participation, and "consultants in social and market research that render service for the setup of participation processes, market research and social studies" (mission statement of the company Consultores Investigación Social y de Mercados), etc.

Furthermore, we propose that this uncertain reality contains a particular *nébuleuse*, in the sense used by Robert Cox. It contains a “formal and informal network that is ever more identifiable, although not embodied in a single agent or agency including state, corporations and intellectuals that work towards a formulation of politics of consensus oriented at the maintenance of global capitalism” (Cox & Schechter, 2002: 33). This network is closely related to Brown’s definition of neoliberalism, introduced at the beginning of this chapter. For Brown, neoliberalism is characterised by monetising all areas of public and private life (2015: 21) – in this case, towards the maintenance of the NPT and towards the organisation of the politics of uninterest. The use of this meaning of *nébuleuse* makes it possible to characterise a way in which the neoliberal side of the participation services market appears.

With regard to the second idea, tied to the plural character of the market, in Spain, it is interesting to use, as a way of thinking about that plurality, the difference between the social market and the neoliberal market of CP services. The social market is characterised by offering services oriented according to the principles of the social and solidarity economy, an “approach to economic activity that takes into account people, the environment and sustainable development, as a priority, above other interests” (REAS solidarity economy charter). Here we find research groups, consultancies and freelancers, as well as some of the attitudes of certain technical participation agents who work in public employment. The second, neoliberal market, is characterised by its Coxian nebulosity, by orienting participative practice according to capitalist criteria of productivity and profit, understood in accordance with the understandings of NPM.

Looking at the situation of these 96 consultancy companies, it is possible to observe the existence of some peaks in the emergence of these agents in the years: 1999, 2000–2006 and 2011–2013 (cf. Graph 1).

One of the elements that would explain these peaks is the effect of legislative action, an activity that has been defined as central to the form of neoliberalism identified by Slobodian (2018). Therefore, in explaining the 1999 peak, it is important to know that, by that date, the Spanish Autonomous Regions had already approved many of the instruments of governmental participation: citizens’ initiatives, sectorial councils, etc. What is more, the echo of the Porto Alegre participatory budgets



Graph 1 Chronological organisation of the 96 consultancies studied by year of creation. (Source: Martínez Palacios, 2019: 100)

was starting to have an effect, and the public authorities did not yet have a corps of technical agents. Thus, the move from activist to artisan through a foundation offering participation services is an essential one. The form of a foundation has been chosen by many activists who have sought to channel their activities in such a way as to affect institutionalised public action (e.g. the Pere Tarres Foundation).

With regard to the second peak (2000), it is interesting to remember here that this marked the beginnings of the first participatory budgets in Spain and between 2001 and 2002, laws were passed that favoured the creation of a CP services market: Organic Law 4/2001, regulating the Right of Petition; Organic Law 1/2002, regulating the Right of Association; and Law 50/2002, on Foundations. With regard to the 2013 peak, it is worth establishing a link with the passing of Law 19/2013, on transparency, access to public information and good government – which was a clear beginning to the strategy of open government in Spain – and the connection to digital participation of the consultancies created at this time (Komunikatik, Novagob, Delibera, Kuorum) which offer “methodologies for transparency” and participation.

Therefore, Graph 1 involves a *nébuleuse*, one that it is necessary to look more closely at but that responds to a reality: the existence of a demand for institutional participation that indicates the existence of a market in citizen participation services.

When talking about a market, it is important to highlight, as Callon does in the study of hybrid forums (2001), that the market is not an abstract institution. In this regard, teleological discourses regarding their nature are not relevant here. It would not make sense, and it would be inexact to talk about markets in general, and so it is preferable to speak about markets, in plural, which are organised and structured historically and progressively. Furthermore, attending to the use of markets gives our analysis greater exactitude.

In this regard, there are many characterisations proposed in order to organise this plural. Following Fraser and Jaeggi (2019: 27), it is possible to distinguish between the use of markets for *distribution* (focusing on the delivery and sharing out of intangible goods) and their use for *allocation* (oriented at the use of resources for projects that go beyond the individual and reach the collective). Therefore, for greater precision, we can not only talk of markets in participation services but also specify what is referred to by the use of markets; the participation services market is characterised by allocating to social resources (which are none other than forms of capital) uses oriented at collective goals. These collective goals are publically sheathed in the framework of the crisis of democracy but hide, as has been explained above, goals of accumulation of political legitimacy or political and economic profit.

On this point, it is important to indicate that the market forms that occur in capitalist societies have a characteristic incorporated into the logic of exchange that orients them (accumulation-oriented exchange): they establish an instrumental relationship with the product. As Jaeggi says:

...to treat something as a commodity produced for sale is to alter our relation to it and to ourselves. This involves de-personalisation or indifference and orients relations to the world in terms of instrumental, as opposed to intrinsic values. (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2019: 29)

So the indifference that gives oxygen to neoliberal bureaucratisation is constitutive of the capitalist markets. That is to say, one cannot be understood without the other: talking about the neoliberal bureaucratisation of participation means talking about the organisation of uninterest and of its specific expression in indifference.

One of the characteristics of the commercialisation of CP explained in this diagnosis as the third constituent movement of the NPT is the institutionalisation of the logic of competitiveness in the response to the demand for services, a demand oriented to responding to the need to accumulate political legitimacy. When Laval and Dardot say that the “market is a social mechanism that makes it possible to mobilise information and communicate it to others through prices”, they insist that “the economy’s problem is not a general imbalance, but of knowing how individuals can best make use of the fragmentary information they have” (2015: 145–48).

Therefore, the authors point out that competition is a driving factor that defines the nature of this neoliberal market. In Spain, the political evidence of the existence of competition is very clear. A politicisation of participation happens, not in terms of a discussion of *topos*, but rather in terms of the political use of the debates regarding the management of participation in order to obtain political profitability.

Currently, a municipality can hire the consultancy that best fits with its participation framework and philosophy. The breadth of the market makes this possible. This becomes a weapon of political struggle, and there are open conflicts in this regard because the opposition in a municipality considers that the council hires participation services not according to objective criteria, but rather to cronyism and patronage practices.

Competitiveness not only reveals itself in the political field. This logic confronts and puts into competition two ways of seeing participation, in such a way that the struggle for the creation of meanings is already with us. The ideal types of the forms that compete between themselves are as follows: one is focussed on the idea that participation *can* and *should* be sold (explained below as a *nébuleuse*, a neoliberal market in participation, the sophists of participation), and the other defends the view that participation *can be sold but it should not be oriented for sale and commercialisation* (which we refer to in terms of the social market of CP).

4.1 *The Nébuleuse: The Neoliberal Market, or the Sophists Who Coach the Authority*

According to the Spanish Coaching Association (ASESCO), the first rule of coaching is “to be profoundly convinced that people can do everything they believe can be achieved”. The second is to know that “they will have to be constantly reinforcing that conviction”. The first rule involves pretending that structures do not exist, as if life were not vulnerable and finite; the second means to make up a space in which to accommodate the agents, dynamics, products and instruments that make it possible to carry out the work of strengthening an illusion: a market. All those

elements have been brilliantly analysed as a legitimising foundation of neoliberal discourse by Ehrenreich (2018) in *Smile or Die*, and so it should not be a surprise that the principles of coaching applied to participation present certain challenges to those who position themselves critically in this practice. These principles fit very well into the neoliberal project of organising a lack of interest in interest, of knowing the rules of the game, the subtext, the one that is really operating, into the *nobody enters who does not participate in the affairs of the polis because they do not understand their importance*.

Those who believe that participation can and should be sold situate themselves within the discursive framework referred to in the statement by Pere Vallès, CEO of ScytI, in *El economista*, in February 2016 (cf. Sect. 4 of this chapter), according to which there would exist a mature market for participatory democracy in which to sell democracy-focussed products. According to the data collected, these are particularly consultancies created in the 1980s (e.g. Euroconseil, Estrategia Local and others) that are public limited companies, with more than 10 staff, who offer participation services that function according to the logic of accumulation in order to “improve the effectiveness of political leaders and the public institutions” (Estrategia Local).

These agents coach “institutions administered by any of the democratic political options”, helping to build an internal organisational structure of participation (structure administrative bodies or administrative modelling of participation), and their list of services speaks the language of the market. So, as they point out, they carry out “citizen participation operations” when they refer to the creation of participative budgets, plans and policies (Estrategia Local). In short, among the important agents in this *nébuleuse*, it is possible to find a profile made up of public or private limited companies, including medium to large corporate groups, that work in multiple territories on different scales – sometimes in different countries – offering all kinds of services, not just participation. In the sampling of the profiles of the agents at the head of these companies, it is usual to find men, often industrial engineers with a postgraduate degree in organisational innovation.

As sophists, they know that in order to hold a position in the *nébuleuse*, it is necessary to have a rhetoric that is appropriate to the variations that exist in the configuration of the field of power. So, the rhetoric used by those who offer their services according to this approach stands out by, firstly, underlining flexibility, adaptability and possibility of carrying out administrative coaching on CP based on the neoliberal rationality of the accumulation of symbolic goods:

EVM.net is an ecosystem of people, tools and processes that are organised in a flexible and innovative way to give effective, efficient and high added value solutions to the different challenges and problems that occur in any area of society. (EVM consultancy)

We facilitate the “optimisation of resources and the maximisation of impacts.” (97 sf. Consultants)

Secondly, by using a commercial and productivist discourse oriented at the accumulation of profit and goods based on the implementation of *ad hoc* products that are both unique and customised. This personalisation of the service is no impediment to

maintaining a principle of commercial existence characterised by the professionalism that is conferred on the ability to work with anyone who requests it:

What distinguishes us is our openness, professionalism, rigour and responsibility. We offer efficient, successful solutions that can help improve efficiency in management and improve government. We are able to work with any person, organisation or authority, at any time, anywhere, since our central tool is knowledge. We are sociable people who work in an effective, flexible and results-oriented way, and in constant professional development. We seek to create connected spaces that promote creativity, allowing you to be more productive; spaces that, above all, make your professional life easier and happier. Together we can change our working spaces, organisational culture and the way in which we are with our clients. (Iritziak Batuz)

Tomás Calvo, talking about the Sophists of ancient Greece (1986: 69–74), explains that their professionalism, their way of seeing the professional, provoked criticism because, on the one hand:

They aspired to teach *areté*, an aspiration that was inadmissible for aristocrats because *areté* could not be taught, it was something characteristic of the nobility, and on the other hand, for democrats, because *areté* was indeed learned, but in the heart of the *polis*. The true education is community education.

Just like the Sophists, the agents that form part of this *nébuleuse* compete among themselves and with others to achieve the greatest number of students-customers to teach. Equally, they receive criticism from the participative aristocracy which sees the facilitation of any kind of agent as unnecessary, intuiting that any sort of mediation, even neoliberal mediation, might pave the way to a loss of privileges for those who already possess a participative *habitus*. They also face the reproaches of those who have a critical position with regard to the participation services market; reproaches of “infiltration”, commercialism and “patronage” (it was possible to hear this kind of discrediting remarks at the ninth participation education conference, “Patas arriba: el (a)salto de la participación”, which took place on October 28, 29 and 30, 2016, in Cordoba, which featured 56 people from the field of participation in alignment with the social market of CP), which makes it easier for them to present themselves as heroes of participation.

Third, by making use of the tool of conceptual stretching in order to achieve more, and more diverse, clients. This *nébuleuse* is propelled by a greater tendency to mobilise the discourse of “open government”, and so all companies that specialise in open government services can be found in this market. Furthermore, they tend to offer a definition of participation that is synonymous with communication, transparency and information:

ATC-SIG SL makes available to (...) council, a communication, transparency and participation team that works with the goal of improving the council’s communication, giving the municipal website more content in order to provide more information and to promote citizen participation. Our practice works to increase communication and improve transparency, thus contributing to greater participation. (Consultoría ATC)

With regard to the practices of those situated in this market, it is usual to find the offer of services based on a search for a balance between flexibility and security through standardisation. So they sell standardised products applied to the

management of participation, such as the Predictive Index[®], a tool created to “fire up productivity” and efficiently manage information about the creation of job targets whose logics are linked to the sphere of participation. Although the creation of evaluation indices or moulded participation products is not specific to this market, it is certainly more common, and something that is characteristic is the use of licence fees in their application. That is to say, the existence of the licence, which involves paying for a product, is fundamental in the *nébuleuse*, since these levels of standardisation through a tool or index are also found in the social market, in which, however, they are proposed with a common, open licence.

Despite the fact that the rhetoric of efficiency is present in this way of being in the market, with its notions such as rapidity, flexibility, etc., those who are situated here make use of labels that are characteristic of other practices, those more typical of slower pace and another, artisanal, way of understanding participation. Here it is obvious that market competition is also a fight, a competition for the meaning of categories; a fight to mean. One of the firms studied, for example, introduces the notion of craft, and its discourse is reminiscent of a neoliberal practice of collaborative management of authorities, offering products with copyright:

We are bespoke consultants. We have the spirit of the artisan, which allows us to adjust to each reality. Our interest is focussed on facilitating and accompanying the processes of development of people, teams and organisations. We are committed to continuous improvement and innovation, with very practical methodologies that are applied to each context. (Prímula consultants, which is a signatory of the first Aragon Participa methodological workbook in citizen participation)

Coaching authorities in participation is accompanied by a series of discursive ornaments/accessories that emphasise innovation and the ability to mobilise contacts, resources and networks of actors – which are generally mentioned using the English word “partner”. What is more, they depict the consultancy as being at the cutting edge of the industry. This discourse sustains, in symbolic terms, the sophistic or technical capital that characterises the *nébuleuse*. The following example illustrates this idea well.

Civici (Barcelona, Madrid and Seville)

Founding date: 2000

With over 20 years of experience in participation processes in different sectors, we support your project to a successful conclusion.

Definition: We are experts in participation, and we help those who want to participate. To participate is to share, get involved, become committed... To participate is to discover, debate and decide. At Civici, we respond to the growing demand for the transparency and management of participation processes, offering data for analysing and taking better decisions. Civici is a dynamic, multidisciplinary company which understands participation as a continuous, everyday process. We accompany our customers and offer a bespoke solution for each need.

Our experience and project allow us to enrich Civici constantly and to offer the latest innovations in participation. At Civici, we link up with the industry’s best companies in order to offer the most complete solution for our customers. Our partners have a very special place in our strategic development, and for this reason, we are permanently with them, rewarding each collaborator’s commitment and involvement. Through our joint cooperation agreements, we offer an integrated service of maximum quality for the benefit both of our partners and of the end users.

Source: Own elaboration based on the consultancy’s 2018 list of services

In light of this characterisation, it would be interesting to think about the role of these agents who intervene in the market, in a neoliberal way, as sophists, artisans in name only, concerned about innovation, who form an active part of a Coxian *nébuleuse* in that they appeal insistently to the network of partners they are able to mobilise to achieve the goals of the public authority. An invisible yet effective network that shows how little priority is given to building a community ethos. The important thing is to have *habitus*, in all senses of the word, but, above all, in the most profound way: the one that allows the agent to make forecasts of the future in a variable market regarding what will, and what will not, have value in the field of power.

4.2 *The Social Market in Participation*

With the aim of differentiating themselves through a critical stance on the use and handling of participation, the social market in CP services is structured around social and solidarity economic networks, such as the Madrid Social Market and the REAS group of networks. Not all consultancies or groups that include the majority of the principles of the social and solidarity economy are nominally in a network, but in their lists of services, they always make reference to elements related to networks. This is, precisely, a characteristic that acts as a boundary between one market and the other.

In terms of the profile of agents that we find here, it is worth pointing out that they are companies, mostly cooperatives, made up of less than 10 people, who come from different areas of the social sciences, humanities, social work, social education and psychology. Here we find a strong presence of cooperative consultancies headed by women who develop a rhetoric related to a semantic group that links up with social justice, CP, the community, concern for time-taking, knowledge recognition and the importance of building trust and commitment. There is an activist *pathos* of commitment to the cause of participation that clashes with the extractivist logic of the market but that is necessary so that participative systems subsist. Without the free (unpaid) work that is extracted from the existence of this underground complicity that moves the agents of the social market, it would not be possible to undertake many participatory processes.

Consequently, the lists of services include goals such as the following: the “search for a fairer society” (Jaume Bofil Foundation); an interest in “careful, scientific, useful responses” (Ferrer i Guàrdia Foundation); the need to orient their work towards “improving democratic quality” (EIDOS); and the need to offer a definition of participation linked to community, social justice and community development. Following a *topos* that is critical of crisis (often linked to a discourse on the care crisis), they talk about participation in order to “situate people and communities at the centre of life, committing to a redefinition of the public within the commons space” (CIMAS).

As well as a defence of common goods, in this market, unlike in the *nébuleuse*, it is possible to find critical and feminist approaches to participation, which means

that talking about the care crisis and putting people's lives at the heart of decision-making processes brings reflection, often in intersectional terms, on the economic, social and administrative model that sustains society and social life. They feature the growing influence of the discourse and practice of the feminist economy. That is to say, their point of view is that talking about participation involves talking about the material and symbolic structures that organise life:

Feminism and the gender perspective touch all of our actions. Currently, our activity covers five lines of work: training and raising awareness, research and consultancy, communication, cultural management, and participation. (Pandora Mirabilla)

This small cooperative was founded from a commitment to inclusion, empowerment and participation so that we can journey towards greater social justice. The Aradia that has inspired our name used witchcraft as a tool of social resistance against the forms of oppression experienced by the most vulnerable people. We take magic into training and research as instruments of struggle against forms of domination that are still current today. (Aradia Coop.)

Despite internal differences, the common element among the consultancies in this market is a commitment to an artisan approach to participation, criticism of indifference and a search for longer timeframes in which to weave relationships (e.g. the Cooperativa de Iniciativa Social, Emprendimiento y Consultoría Social highlights this, as one of its principles: “involvement, the realities that we tackle in our work do not leave us cold”). This criticism of fast turnovers and dispassionate working methods in participation is actually a criticism of the dominant management model in market and economic relations.

Given the struggle for the meanings that characterise the neoliberal era, the need to distance oneself from this market is clear. Some consultancies have detected this, and so they feel obliged to coin concepts that differentiate them from those who are promoting a participation *nébuleuse*. This is the case of the Plevia cooperative, made up of three women from the social sciences, who have innovated the term “signature consultancy”:

Signature consultancy grants meaning to the way we carry out our work, and we have referred to the world of cookery to give an idea of what we do and what we offer customers: a great space full of scents, flavours and textures, in which three chefs give free reign to their creativity and their experience in order to create unique dishes with our own personal seal, through a harmonious mixture between ingredients that are traditional to each place (its people) and impeccable creation processes. (Plevia)

If the sophists of participation clash with the aristocrats and the artisans but are favoured by the inertia of the *nébuleuse*, being in the market with a critical perspective is a constant struggle given the discomfort involved in the precarity and uncertainty created by planting a permanent doubt about the dominant *habitus*. The discomfort is very much due to the cold of experimenting without models to follow and to the disposition of an “*outsider habitus*” (Ripio, 2015) which has to resist the warnings and admonishments to return to the path of normality. Those admonishments are daily occurrences, occur through naturalised practice and are channelled via authoritarian formulas of exercising power.

These attempts at domestication that are characteristic of neoliberalism and necessary to the policy of building a lack of interest appear from the moment the process of forming the organisational project (foundation of the consultancy) begins. For example, when, on a course offered by a local institution for advising new cooperatives and companies, one of those who formed part of the social market in participation was invited to remove “feminist” from the company’s mission statement so that it would appear less controversial when offering its services to a public authority.

Furthermore, the attempts are channelled throughout the procedure for commissioning the service, even in the practices of authorities that are part of the *nueva institucionalidad* approach to government which try to institutionalise a more critical form of CP. An example of this second idea can be found in the demand made by critical (or not) public authorities when hiring consultancy services from cooperatives in the social market, in which they ask that studies be done with a new perspective, but these authorities ask the cooperatives to establish comparisons with the tendencies identified above. Specifically, when requesting new statistical analyses regarding old categories that allow comparison, it is proposed that the questionnaire’s questions not present radically different considerations. For example, with regard to the gender variable, the introduction of another variable, which would make it possible to work using the intersectionality tool in participation, is frowned on, because it would make the job of comparison impossible.³

5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have looked at the particular form adopted by the participatory turn in Spain, for which a genetic analysis of the institutionalisation of public action in participation between 1978 and 2017 has been carried out, by means of the study of a series of political products that today constitute part of the country’s participation industry.

After the analysis of the empirical material (see Table 1), we have concluded, supported by Marxian interpretations of neoliberalism (Bourdieu, 1997; Hibou, 2012; Brown, 2015; Fraser & Jaeggi, 2019; Slobodian, 2018), that the participatory turn in Spain has a neoliberal nature, which involves a greater presence of private business corporations in public decision-making and a reassessment of the importance of legal capital when it comes to designing the participatory structures of government. Specifically, there are three movements that lead us to this conclusion.

The first is the naturalisation of a *topos* of the crisis in democracy that allows large economic corporations to introduce their citizen participation products,

³We owe this idea to the Liquen DataLab cooperative and to the discussion that took place during the conference on participation and feminism organized by Barcelona City Council on 5 February, 2019.

oriented at the accumulation of capital. Furthermore, this *topos* is designed based on a sequence that includes a medicalised idea of participation.

The second movement deals with the neoliberal bureaucratisation of participation. We have mentioned seven rationalisation practices by which the bureaucratisation of participation is currently being carried out in Spain. In this regard, we have mentioned the importance of taking into consideration the paradox of the project of debureaucratising democracy, bureaucratising participation. Furthermore, we have underlined that it is not a question, for now, of eliminating all bureaucratic practices in the institutional design of participation, but of reflecting on the effects created by privileging the accumulation of legal and social capital in agents when integrating and designing a participative process. Something like the institution of a “reflective bureaucracy”.

The third movement, covered in greater depth, is related to the commercialisation of participation. We know that the move from the artisan approaches in participation of the 1970s to the participation industry of the 2010s has resulted in different citizen participation markets (Mazeaud & Nonjon, 2018). The text has identified the social market and the neoliberal market. In this regard, in future studies of the workings of the citizen participation market, it might be less interesting to carry out a descriptive analysis of the tendencies of each market, and rather to study the uses made by states of these, and to discern the role played by bureaucracy in them.

In these pages, we have outlined the main features of the diagnosis related to the idea of NPT. Without a doubt, there are many aspects of each of the turn’s movements that could be looked at more deeply. We wished to focus particularly on the commercialisation of participation because of the challenge facing participation in this country, that of having to preserve its radicalism in the midst of the process of modernising government by means of NPM programmes in which a criticism of bureaucracy tends to be resolved with more bureaucracy (Hibou, 2012; Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017). Looking to the future, what is needed is to continue to study each of the movements mentioned here, examining in greater depth some of the instruments for the implementation of public action that have not been covered here; these instruments include the collaboration agreements that are set within the framework of procedures involving the outsourcing of citizen participation among public authorities of different sizes and third parties. From the systematic study of these and other documents that are central to the authority’s workings, it will be possible to calculate more precisely the degree to which participatory neoliberalism dismantles democracy.

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Responses from Urban Democratization to Global Neoliberalism



Iago Lekue  and Imanol Telleria 

Abstract Walking, feeling, breathing in, and getting lost in the streets are the best ways to get to know a city. When moving through a city in this way, we can see social imbalances, segregated spaces and neighborhoods, and changes in the landscape. Beneath what lies in plain sight lie mechanisms and regulatory apparatus. These include norms and socio-institutional structures that operate at different scales, from the local to the supranational. As we describe in this chapter, these influence urban dynamics beyond what our senses perceive directly. While we must take into account relationships between social agents, we must not overlook interactions between the agency itself and broader local, national, and international structures.

Processes of capitalist globalization, until 1970, unfolded mainly within the framework of nationally organized state territorialities. More recently, these dynamics have changed and increased the importance of sub-national and supranational forms of territorial organization. This in turn has produced a process of rescaling and reterritorialization of capital and power. This is clearly reflected in the transfer of economic-policy authority and jurisdiction from states to the scales mentioned above. In this chapter, we show that both state territoriality and national governance are being redefined and deemphasized toward both wider and narrower scales. This makes up part of a neoliberal strategy to confront crises and be able to regulate capital accumulation more directly.

We read the new role of local agency, as already signaled, on the basis of this diagnosis, and in a context of neoliberal rescaling. We recognize the value of forms of collective action, as well as that of the actors who, with a will toward transformation, have managed to reinvent their activity and delve into different forms of urban democratization.

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1 Introduction: Critical Urban Theory

Cities have offered, over the last half century, attractive case studies for the social sciences, and more specifically for the analysis of ecological systems and statistical data. However, it is with the appearance of critical urban theory that the problems, challenges, and opportunities present in urban social reality have been conceptualized and contextualized with greater rigor.

Far from seeing the city as a mere container for social processes, we must understand that urban space is both an active part and result of disputes that have occurred and continue to occur within it. Critical urban theory (CUT), influenced by the Frankfurt School, shares this school's philosophical criticism of the commodification of political and social institutions but transfers its analysis to a local scale. This is useful in terms of both interpreting and transforming society.

The radicality of this theory resides in the "right to the city" theorized by Lefebvre (1996), through which is expressed an ambition to move toward social justice (Fainstein, 2011). Marcuse (2007, 2012), within the framework of critical urban theory, proposes three major action strategies: exposure, proposal, and politicization. The first emphasizes in-depth analysis of problems, so that they can then be communicated to relevant social actors. In other words, this step involves diagnosing the causes of a problem and facilitating self-treatment. Second, through critical urban theory, strategies and real goals capable of addressing the fundamental causes previously identified should be proposed. Finally, a third step is linked to the politicization of the responses proposed to address the problem identified. This involves focusing on the activating discourses and elements that can weave together alternatives. Depending on the case, this can also involve mobilizing the media and even academia.

As we will see as the chapter progresses, CUT is an appropriate tool with which to understand the phenomena and dynamics that neoliberalism and capitalist urbanization produce in cities (Brenner, 2009a; Marcuse et al., 2014; Bossi, 2019). Below, we analyze the economic and political context in which Western cities find themselves. On the one hand, we see how the process of rescaling has brought cities to the fore, turning them into an important terrain of ideological dispute. On the other hand, we analyze the challenges and threats that neoliberalism and its global economic dynamics pose for urban democracy. Finally, we gather alternatives and new trends that are working toward the democratization of cities. Among these, from an integral perspective, it is worth studying the contributions of urban movements and participatory practices promoted by some local governments in the development of contemporary urban policy.

2 Rescaling and How Cities Became Central

As Brenner (1999) correctly points out, globalization is a process with a multiscale and multitemporal evolution. However, it is not until 1970 that, in the global West, new manifestations of statehood, including city networks, and the European Union itself, take on greater relevance in the global economic panorama. It is for this very reason that we affirm that globalization cannot be reduced exclusively to flows of people, goods, or capital in the world market. The loss of sovereignty experienced by national states through this process is undeniable (Wriston, 1992; Ohmae, 1995). That said, we attribute this hollowing out process to the very political and economic power of certain states. These states, through their state capacities and “selective” relational conditions, have allowed their own relative weakening in favor of the economic interests of capital (Jessop, 1990, 1994, 2016). We emphasize here the idea of “strategic selectivity” proposed by Jessop (1990, 1994, 2016), which is grounded in the Gramscian theory of the relational state. This is based on the fact that the modern state, whether on a local or national scale, does not always select its strategies rationally or according to an exclusively business logic. If we understand the state as a set of relations between institutions and/or social organizations, which have the function of defining and applying binding collective decisions in a specific territory, we then also understand that, due to power asymmetries that run through these, certain groups can access state authority more easily than others, thus favoring the implementation of some public policies over others (Telleria & Lekue, 2020).

The idea of rescaling thus refers to the transformation, or the appearance of a new balance of powers between different scales, which may be less stable, but probably more proportionate. Taking Europe as an example, we observe how states are being immersed in a dual process of rescaling (Sevilla Buitrago, 2017). On the one hand, we see how they have had to create new institutional frameworks and policies in order to reposition themselves within new forms of supranational government. On the other hand, they have granted new forms of governance at local levels, such as public-private partnerships (Harmes, 2006; Franquesa, 2007; Ahedo & Telleria, 2020), and are offering greater autonomy in terms of economic planning. Through this process, on the one hand, cities continue to agglomerate immobile infrastructure (energy sources, communication networks, business headquarters, etc.). On the other, states, who during Keynesian-Fordism were in charge of currency regulation, legislation, the provision of social welfare and the management of space on a large scale (Lefebvre, 1978: 298) cede, to some extent, this power at the local level.

In accordance with this logic, Sassen (1991, 1993) identifies cities as territorially specific urban places, in which production and reproduction processes decisive for globalization are carried out. Cities are nodes in the networks of the financial service industry and transnational companies.

Swyngedouw (1996, 1997), along the same lines, proposes the term “glocalization” with reference to the manifestation of global economic trends on a local scale. On the one hand, this implies a reconcentration of industry and population in urban areas, which brings about a differentiation of zones and cities which are more

developed than others (even within a national territory). This is what Smith (1984) would call “uneven spatial development.” As we will see in the next section, this occurs as capitalist production processes develop in specific space-times. Capital establishes itself in a specific place and begins to generate profit, until reaching a point where, due to various issues – such as competitiveness – the rate of profit begins to decline below acceptable levels. At this moment, capital moves on in search of a more profitable place. This produces an imbalance between cities and territories. During the Fordist-Keynesian project, the state itself was in charge of compensating for these imbalances (Dunford & Kafkalas 1992; Brenner, 2003a, 2009b; Jessop, 2009).

On the other hand, the management and governance of cities is subject to the dominant economic policy, which implies a reduction of the welfare state, typically managed and implemented at the national level, and increased deregulation of fiscal responsibilities (Brenner, 2003a; Peck, 2012).

Thus, paradoxically, the aforementioned autonomy transferred from states to cities has a priori meant a reduction in autonomy overall. Soja (2000: 218) draws attention to this dynamic as follows: *“The practices of daily life, the public domain of planning and governance, the formation of urban community and civil society, the processes of urban and regional economic development and change, the arena of urban politics, the constitution of the urban imaginary, and the way in which ‘the city’ is represented, are all increasingly affected by global influences and constraints, significantly reducing what might be called the conceptual autonomy of the urban.”*

3 Scalar Instability: Neoliberalism in Cities

The restructuring of scale is part of a set of neoliberal strategies that are *“deeply and indelibly shaped by diverse acts of institutional dissolution”* (Brenner et al., 2011: 20). These regulatory phases are intrinsic to situationally specific processes of neoliberalism, that is, they are always specific to their place and time, as well as to different institutional structures inherited from local, national, or international states.

As stated by Brenner et al. (2010: 330), neoliberalism by definition *“represents an historically specific, unevenly developed, hybrid, patterned tendency of market-disciplinary regulatory restructuring.”* Peck and Tickell (1994: 322) also point out that the neoliberal alternative built from the crisis of Keynesian Fordism is highly unstable temporally and spatially: *business cycles swing ever more violently, while localized growth seems increasingly fragile and short-lived.*

Within the framework of critical urban theory, Harvey (2003, 2006) takes the Schumpeterian concept of *Schöpferische Zerstörung* or “creative destruction” to explain these booms and economic crises. For Smith himself (1984), who explained the phenomenon through “swing theory,” it is nothing more than the pendulum effect of capitalist exploitation. We base our own analysis on the idea of the codependency of capitalism on external markets identified by Luxemburg (1933).

Observing the nature of capital, we understand that it will move to wherever the rate of profit is highest, developing those areas and underdeveloping those where the rate of profit is lower, or in decline. Contradictorily, it is this very development that reduces the high rate of profit. An increase in competitiveness, reduction of unemployment, increase in wages, the appearance of trade union organizations, and, in general, the regulation of production, reduce the return on capital (Jessop et al., 1999).

Capital, subsequently, moves on toward underdeveloped areas, exploiting the opportunities and higher rates of profit available. Thus, a back-and-forth movement takes place through the continuous migration of capital between developed and underdeveloped areas. Capital shifts from fixed to circulating capital and back again to fixed capital. This can happen at all spatial scales. However, Smith (1984) asserts that it is on the urban scale that this pattern has gone the furthest.

Creative destruction, then, serves to describe the geographically unequal, socially regressive, and politically volatile trajectory of institutional-spatial changes that have crystallized in the profound transformation of the institutional infrastructures on which Fordism-Keynesian was based, at all scales (Brenner & Theodore, 2002).

Following phases of socio-spatial destruction caused by deindustrialization and neoliberal crises, which have been characterized by offensives against organized labor, a reduction in and privatization of public services, and a criminalization of the urban poor, we are currently at a moment of construction of a phase of neoliberalism adapted to and guided by urban regeneration and business-oriented urban development (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015). In this context, the moments of creation identified by Brenner and Theodore (2002) in relation to six areas of regulation around which changes are orientated are interesting. These areas include: the wage relationship; inter-capitalist competition; financial and monetary regulation; forms of governance; international configurations and uneven spatial development. The moment of destruction in the wage relationship, for example, can be understood as the continuous attacks on organizations, union agreements, and collective bargaining agreements, and its analogous moment of creation would take the form of competitive deregulation, that is, the atomized renegotiation of working conditions.

At a global level, we do identify four categories of adaptations of neoliberalization that have been implemented by states (Jessop, 2002): pure neoliberalism, neo-corporatist, neo-statist, and neo-cumunitarianism. However, to approach the case of cities, we favor a different framework. Specifically, this is a temporal interpretation of the aforementioned dynamic of creative destruction in three phases (Brenner & Theodore, 2002): proto-neoliberalism, the neoliberalism of “cuts” (*roll-back neoliberalism*), and the neoliberalism of deployment (*roll-out neoliberalism*).

First of all, “proto-liberalism” refers to the emergence of the city as a battlefield. In the midst of economic restructuring, a moment in which a decline in industry provoked economic dislocations, the strategies adopted by cities promoted economic growth through deregulation initiatives. This occurred despite the fact that the sociopolitical agreements inherited from Fordism-Keynesian institutions based on redistribution were maintained. This was a time of instability and dispute between models, turning cities into battlefields. The refusal of the United States Federal Government, in coordination with the financial sector, to renegotiate New York

City's debt in the 1970s economically stifled an urban development model characterized by public employment and the wide provision of services. Above all, however, this act fulfilled its deterrent function for other cities in the following decades (Ahedo & Telleria, 2020).

Secondly, "cutbacks neoliberalism" makes reference to the withdrawal of states from government control of resources and the destruction of the welfare state. It is from 1980 onward that this begins to take shape in local administrations, through spending reduction formulas, with the ultimate aim of reducing spending in state administrations. In the same vein, fiscal austerity measures were also implemented, including the reduction of social benefits and wage cuts in the public sector. In many cities, "good practice" manuals were approved with the intention of promoting administrative efficiency and a favorable climate for what we would today call "business-oriented urbanism" or "entrepreneurial cities" (Harvey, 1989; Jessop, 1997). More recently, linked to the financial crisis of 2008, *austerity urbanism* (Peck, 2012) has become the most common way of managing the financial restrictions affecting local governments.

In this context, a transition process in urban governance began. This process is more concerned with promoting a place and economic growth through public-private partnerships than with social welfare (Harvey, 1989; Hall & Hubbard, 1996). In this phase, city councils began to take on megalomaniac policies for large events and internationally competitive urban marketing emerged. Strategies connected the local with the global, all within the framework of interscalar competition between cities (Cox, 1993). On the other hand, cities also began to prioritize spaces within their own territories, through spectacular and attractive urban projects (Swyngedouw et al., 2002).

Thus, we arrive at a third phase: deployment neoliberalism. After the destructive period of cut-back neoliberalism, the so-called *roll-out neoliberalism* strengthened the patterns that urban entrepreneurship had experimented with. Once neoliberal modes of management have been normalized, there is a move toward depoliticizing the economy through technocrats. This is a reconstitution of the classical liberal project through the facilitating intervention of public institutions (especially state institutions). The truth is that local policies are made subservient to the interests of private capital. We are, therefore, witnessing an institutionally created neoliberal project (Jones & Ward, 2002).

Given these conditions, institutions, regardless of scale, have tried to regulate the system through what Jessop (1992) would call "*institutional fixes*." Rejecting the idea that these arrangements have favored the welfare state characteristic of Keynesianism, Jessop points out that this has been replaced by the post-Fordist pattern of a Schumpeterian work state. In this sense, the state – local or national – strengthens its role in promoting competition (not only of national companies, but at all levels and sectors of the system of production). Institutional fixes, by means of patches of questionable durability, focus their efforts on fostering institutional innovation in order to promote the structural competitiveness of economies, by dismantling prior political frameworks through and for new models (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). This certainly results in maintaining and reproducing the new and old

patterns of creative destruction, achieving stability in one area at the cost of instability in another (Jessop, 2016).

This said, it should be noted that institutional restructuring that occurs on an urban scale is mutable according to the moment of crisis and can also present points of weakness that can serve as windows of opportunity for the democratization of cities.¹

Given the above, we understand neoliberalism as a constant and emerging, as well as contradictory (Harvey, 2014), state strategy, which through deregulation and competition seeks to generate competitive advantages in specific places (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). In other words, contrary to the strategies of *pure* neoliberalism (Jessop, 2002) such as austerity policies, privatizations, reduction of direct taxes, etc., current neoliberalism can be reinterpreted “as a contradictory practice of state intervention, which attempts to lead state institutions to dismantle regulatory restrictions, promote market-mediated forms of governance, and protect the interests of transnational corporations” (Brenner, 2003b).

4 The Democratizing Reform of Cities

At this point, it might seem that the discourse that *there is no alternative* has been successfully imposed. However, there are numerous experiences and processes that have aimed to reclaim the democratizing potential of cities in a global context. In this respect, we can see how, on the one hand, rescaling has brought the site of decision-making closer to cities. This does not mean that democratization has occurred, but it does imply a certain reduction in institutional infrastructure, which can facilitate a questioning of the urban neoliberal model, at least in a local context. On the other hand, it remains to be seen if neoliberalism itself has, at some point, opened a window of opportunity in which processes of transformation of reality can gain strength.

In the above contextualization, we have tried to present the dynamics and transformations that constitute the chaotic environment in which we find ourselves today. We believe that understanding this context is necessary in order to understand the challenges posed and identify opportunities to propose, regardless, more democratic alternatives in urban contexts.

First of all, we would like to bring to the fore a concept that, in a context where governance is made up of various actors, interest groups, and networks, can serve us

¹Brenner and Theodore (2002) mention the following: “the establishment of cooperative networks led by companies in local politics; the mobilization of new local economic development policies that promote cooperation between companies and industrial groups; the deployment of community-based programs to reduce social exclusion; the promotion of new forms of work in coordination and inter-organizational networks in previously independent spheres of local state intervention; and the creation of new regional institutions to promote the marketing of place at the metropolitan level, and intergovernmental coordination.”

as a control and coordination tool. “Colibration” is the term that Dunsire (1990, 1993) coined to refer to intervention in an existing balance between various figures. It refers to the implementation of control measures to tip the balance between two opposing positions and expressions. In this way, colibration as a tool of governance can serve, on the one hand, to identify which antagonistic forces and actors exist in a specific case and, on the other, to judge whether equilibrium or isostasy occurs in line with specific public policies. In addition, if necessary, it can facilitate intervention, not directed so much toward harmony, but rather to altering a possible imbalance in favor of the side or interests that need the most support (Dunsire, 1990: 17). Ultimately, it is about implementing control measures to tip the balance between two opposing positions and expressions.

This tool is fundamental for the recovery of the local autonomy of governments, since it tries to provide fundamental norms of governance, establishing some “rules of the game” that aim to promote collectively agreed goals (Jessop, 2016). That is to say, taking advantage of the privileged strategic position of the state or a local administration,² it aims to rearticulate both decision-making processes and the power of the actors who take part in these, in order to guarantee the democratic quality of governance. Ultimately, we return to a reflection on the idea of strategic selectivity mentioned above. Here, colibration can act as a barrier and firewall for certain sectors and also promote less favored sectors in relationship systems.

This is not only about promoting good governance from institutions, nor about monitoring it while disregarding the social fabric. It is about adjusting governance, making use of the “collaborative advantage” (Font, 1997) and making the government or local administrations vanguard actors that confront neoliberalization processes as they are expressed in the fragmented set of actors that constitute local governance. In short, we bring to the fore the idea that “colibration is a critique of political economy, forms of domination, and ideology” (Jessop, 2016: 229).

Second, we must emphasize the opportunities that participatory processes offer. In Western urban contexts, since the beginning of the millennium, participation, guided and directed by institutions as a means to legitimize projects and even strategies, has been an important topic of debate. Some perspectives reject it because of its *top-down* logic, while others view it as a possible loophole through which to take part in and find ways to implement more inclusive alternatives (García-Espín & Jimenez, 2017; Blanco et al., 2018).

Although colibration can function as a guarantor that the community fabric is part of public policy-making processes, it is necessary to go a step further and establish stable mechanisms of participation (Telleria & Ahedo, 2015). The aim of this is, on the one hand, to influence the urban agenda and, on the other to investigate the co-production of public policy.

²We use the term “administration,” since we consider that it better captures and makes visible the importance that bureaucracy can have. We refer here to the importance that Gramsci (1975, Q 15) attached to this, as it performs technical and political functions. Furthermore, a Gramscian approach considers the loyalty of the bureaucracy to the state to be indispensable, since it is the bureaucracy that puts state ideology into practice.

This last concept of co-production (Parés, 2017; Arnanz et al., 2018; Osborne et al., 2016) is evolving into a proposal that goes beyond the implementation of participatory processes or mechanisms, and points toward a logic of “globally participated public policies” (Subirats et al., 2009). Contrary to classic interpretations (Rosentraub & Sharp, 1981), we consider that today co-production does not refer only to the spontaneous and strategic appearance of individuals or interest groups in relation to specific public services. Instead, it is better understood as a new tool – if not a new model – of governance that proposes collective participation as a fundamental axis on which to make decisions (Sorrentino et al., 2018; Nabatchi et al., 2017).

It is certainly an innovative tool, so far subject to little empirical study. However, due to its adaptive capacity in response to changes in power relations, it shows great potential. In fact, in recent years, facilitated by new municipalism, innovative experiences and processes have been witnessed from the point of view of deepening democracy in the following urban policies (Blanco & Subirats, 2012; Telleria, 2020): public space, housing, sustainability, and mobility. Despite the fact that these issues are not novel, the way of addressing them generates a substrate necessary to advance in the democratic reform of the cities. The so-called double legitimization is still yet to be achieved. This legitimization must occur “downward,” by social and popular sectors that defend this model (also at the polls), and upward. In this case, this means overcoming impediments at other levels of government that act against these processes of democratic deepening. These impediments include the imposition of spending ceilings and, as in the case of remunicipalization processes initiated by different cities in the Spanish State, through judicial implements. The judiciary fulfills in this area, with speed and efficiency, the function of protecting the private interests of large economic corporations against municipal policies that pursue the general interest, including the improvement of services, and even the reduction of public spending.

On the other hand, one of the main assets in the struggle to democratize cities is what Castells (1974) would call “urban social movements”³ and participation by irruption, or spontaneous disruptive action from below.

When the master framework of urban movements changed (Telleria & Ahedo, 2016), these movements shifted, starting in the 1980s and 1990s, from demanding greater representative democracy and social/identity related rights, to demanding to be part of and embedded in institutional systems. After verifying the limits and resistance to change that the representative model offered, the master framework transformed, articulating discourses that vindicated participatory democracy and

³We use the term “urban movements,” since we consider that this term is better adapted to the reality of today’s cities. We believe that movements themselves must identify themselves as urban, citizen, or consider themselves related to the city as a condition of understanding them as truly urban movements (Castells, 1983). However, it is essential to return to the context of rescaling and take into account the multiscalar relationship that urban movements have today with territory (Swyngedouw, 2004). These are far removed from the organizational structures and mobilization strategies that previously existed.

ultimately economic democracy, as the movements against evictions and the squatting movement have demonstrated (Martínez, 2011; Bonet i Martí, 2012; González García et al., 2019).

In this sense, the neoliberal instability that we have been discussing has meant that the moments of greatest impact of urban movements on the urban agenda have varied. Brenner et al. (2012: 18–19) claim that the transformative potential of collective action depends on two basic factors: “*the objective position, power, and strategies of those currently established in positions of domination; and the objective position, power, and strategies of those who are mobilizing in opposition to established forms of urbanism.*”

5 Conclusions: Toward Counter-Neoliberalization

We understand that the democratizing reform of cities depends on the conjunction of different forces and strategies that, from within and outside the state, are committed to supporting practices and projects that reinforce the participation of all sectors, especially those furthest removed from power. Linked to this reflection, we emphasize the importance of not isolating scales of action. As has been demonstrated, action oriented toward the same objective is essential. It is of little use to advocate for the radical democratization of urban spaces if the contradiction with the principles of global neoliberalism is not brought to the fore. Based on the strategic logic of critical urban theory, we have tried to illustrate the complex characteristics of today’s cities, as well as their potential to generate processes of democratic deepening in the current context of neoliberal intensification. Although, quantitatively, there have been many experiments in this area, contemporary reality is still very volatile and disconnected. It can be safely said that there is still a long way to go before its consolidation, both in the social fabric and in local administrations, might enable it to serve as an effective tool in processes of counter-neoliberalization.

The abovementioned points toward a need for collective action to be oriented toward counter-liberalization, dismantling its inherited and rearticulated structures, constraining the market and developing new alternative frameworks. This means a move from disarticulated counter-liberalization based on local action, toward a stage of deep socialization in which neoliberalized normative regimes are dismantled (Brenner et al., 2010).

In this sense, the wave of protests and mobilizations in the spring of 2011, regardless of their different roots across different urban centers, represented a turning point from which to understand what Walliser and De la Fuente (2018) define as “new urban activism.” This turning point for territorial collective action (it was a turning point for collective action in general within and outside the borders of the Spanish State), not only marked an increase or resurgence of mobilization, but it was also qualitatively expressed in other parameters. These mobilizations culminated, in many cases, with the institutionalization of the movement and the appearance of movement candidates and confluences in various cities. These have

undoubtedly influenced and conditioned the urban agenda. Janoschka and Mota (2018) summarize the new lines of action on the urban agenda proposed by “City Councils for Change” as follows: (1) Stop predatory expansive urbanization. (2) Re-municipalize services privatized during previous administrations. (3) Recover public space. (4) Regenerate democracy through the implementation of new participatory mechanisms. The momentum generated by municipalism in the Spanish state has been able to raise issues and even carry out projects such as the remunicipalization of water in Valladolid, the achievement of sovereignty for the direct management of cleaning and rescue services in Cádiz, and the process of negotiation around and recovery of empty houses owned by banks for social housing, which occurred in Barcelona (Roth et al., 2019).

It should also be noted that, simultaneously, urban movements less linked to territory have resurfaced, including feminist or environmental movements. Transcending different scales, they are reactivating the effectiveness lost by the cycle of protests that made up the alterworld and global movements (Tarrow, 1998). These urban movements of “glocalized urban protests” (Köhler & Wissen, 2003; Martí i Costa & Bonet i Martí, 2008) continue to prosper and influence the urban and international agenda. They put very diverse issues on the table, including mobility, the reduction of harmful gas emissions at national and global levels, community defense against evictions, and a gender perspective in local public policies. In this sense, these movements can play an important role in a multi-scalar scenario such as the one we have described. Finally, despite the high degree of uncertainty generated by the COVID pandemic at the present time, there is evidence that shows (Atlas de la Pandemia en España⁴) that this dynamic of democratic deepening in urban contexts has been maintained and even intensified, through collective action and institutionalized mechanisms.

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⁴Atlas de la Pandemia en España, a publication in process by the National Geographic Institute and the Spanish Association of Geography, under the direction of José Francisco Sánchez, from the University of Alcalá de Henares, and Jorge Olcina, from the University of Alicante. This publication is part of the SOLIVID Research Project, a collective project for the construction of a collaborative map and an online resource bank on solidarity initiatives confronting the COVID-19 crisis. Enlace: <https://www.solivid.org/?lang=es>.

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State Construction and Democratization: The Basque Union Majority in the Face of Systemic Exclusion



Jon Azkune , Jule Goikoetxea , and Eneko A. Romero 

Abstract This chapter seeks to analyze the tension between strategies for de-democratization – the privatization of democracy – and democratization in operation in the contemporary state. We begin by conceptualizing the state, adopting a strategic-relational approach that allows us to overcome the structure-agency division and to understand the state as a complex relationship. We situate this theoretical reflection within the study of neoliberalism as a form of governmentality, offering an approach that is not limited to the field of economics. Neoliberalism is driven by states, through states, and develops within states themselves. Therefore, on a more concrete level, we analyze the most direct consequence of neoliberalism: the privatization of democracy. While this model does strategically reinforce private institutions and actors, it is also necessary to study the resistance and alternative proposals for democratization that arise in response. We analyze the case of Basque majority unionism to draw attention to democratization strategies employed by subjects formerly included in the “power bloc” and subsequently expelled in the post-Fordist era. We conclude that one strategy for democratization is based on a re-territorialization of power through public institutionalization, including not only the subjects and classes more recently excluded from power through neoliberal governmentality, but others that were not central in other forms of governmentality either. We call this strategy “communitarian statism.”

Keywords State · Trade unions · Governmentality · Democratization · Strategic-relational approach

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1 Introduction

Saskia Sassen illustrates how the dynamics of globalization have been driven by states themselves, transferring key elements of nation-states to the private sphere. This process has led to what we call the privatization of democracy (Goikoetxea, 2017). The transference of state capabilities and, therefore, public and political capacities (from decision-taking, lawmaking, and implementation to evaluation, re-regulation, production, and distribution) into private hands, including those of experts, lobbies, interest groups, executive actors, and corporations, is one feature of the privatization of democracy.

The process of hollowing states' public-political (authoritative) capacities is a process driven by different nation-states (not by objective market necessities or universal economic truths) as a result of power relationships, internal structures and the interests of different socioeconomic classes. In this sense, globalization does not affect all nation-states equally, since the effects within nation-states differ due to the diverse configurations and economic power of each state. According to Sassen (2008), globalization is a process of disassembling the nation-state's organizational logics and authoritative capabilities and reassembling them into global scale economic, judicial, and financial logics. These capabilities and organizational logics are leading to the denationalization of territory. However, in the absence of global public and political structures elected by the people, the word "denationalization" may be understood as a euphemism. If public global structures are not elected by and accountable to the people, denationalization is just another word for the privatization of democracy, or de-democratization.

In the Basque case, one facet of the privatization of democracy is the "expulsion" (Sassen, 2014) of trade unionism, or at least part of it. We have observed how a "hollowing out" of the capacity of the so-called Basque State Institutions (BSI) (Goikoetxea, 2013) has occurred with respect to decision-making around key dimensions of the labor market. This decision-making power has been recentralized in the matrix – central/Spanish – state. This phenomenon has been accompanied by a systemic exclusion, in the sense understood by Sassen (2014), of the socioeconomic classes traditionally represented by unions, leading to an expansion of the tertiary sector of the economy based on precarious or directly unpaid and feminized jobs (Goikoetxea et al., 2020).

Union responses to this process of de-democratization have varied, although we can distinguish two principal union blocks: One is the so-called Basque union majority, made up of two of the main regional unions which are both linked to Basque nationalism, and other smaller sectorial unions. The other block includes the matrix state unions, the UGT and CCOO. In this chapter we analyze the strategy for re-democratization deployed by the first bloc, focusing on attempts to institutionalize an alternative governmentality project at a local scale, as an alternative to that being developed by the matrix state and other BSIs.

To provide support to our thesis, we start with a review of theories of the state, and from this, we develop a causal link between, on the one hand, neoliberal

governmentality and de-democratization and, on the other hand, unionism and democratization, from within our state strategic-relational approach.

2 Theorizing the State: Beyond “Separate Tables”

In most Romance and Germanic languages, words that contain the stem *st-* tend to reflect (st)ability and, therefore, temporal duration: statue, structure, institution, statute, state.... Therefore, as much as we try to do without these terms, one way or another, they always return to the front lines of academic debate, demanding what seems to be a generational readjustment. However, reflection on these terms does not occur in a vacuum but is conditioned by both the dominant currents in each era and the general political context.

When studying the question of the state, a tendency towards disciplinary segmentation has predominated. Gabriel Almond offered the metaphor of “sitting at separate tables” (1988). In his opinion, different schools and sects within political science sit at separate tables, each with its proper conception of what political science is, and each maintaining its own vulnerabilities (1988: 828).

Debate on the theory of the state has run in parallel with the great debates in sociology and political science. These have included the disputes between abstraction and empiricism, structure and agency, and the separation between state and society (Simón, 2004: 47). While each current has defended the supremacy of its approach, only a few attempts have been made to engage in constructive dialogue and integrate the best of each.

We believe that understanding the basis of these debates and trying to move beyond them has helped enrich our theoretical perspective and situate it with respect to the most important epistemological ruptures of recent decades. As Simón indicates, Migdal, who comes from pluralism, and Jessop, whose origins are in Marxist structuralism, have been the only theorists to have developed approaches that draw from different sources while transcending the limits of each (*ibid.*: 425). To the extent that the main axis of Jessop’s work is the theory of the state, it is the primary point of reference in our own theoretical approach.

With respect to the break between abstraction and empiricism, both classical pluralism and behaviorism, driven by authors such as Truman, Dahl, Polsby, and Latham, maintained a blind faith in empiricism (*ibid.*: 455–456). While early criticisms came from the reformist pluralism of Richardson and Jordan and the neopluralism of early Dahl and Lindblom, it was not until Migdal’s contribution that this great theoretical current was able to coherently integrate the interaction between abstraction and empiricism (*ibid.*: 457).

From an antagonistic approach, Althusserian structuralism started from pure abstraction in which structures dominated and “it made no sense to dwell on historical events that did not amount to more than pure anecdotes without explanatory capacity” (*ibid.*: 458). Although Theda Skocpol and Fred Block had already offered criticisms rejecting “the structuralist obsession with abstraction,” it was Bob

Jessop who offered a proposal capable of bringing the “separate tables” together. In his opinion, no empirical and scientifically objective reality appears without prior theorization, and no theoretical abstraction entirely dispenses with real, concrete, and empirical elements (1982: 214). To overcome this false dichotomy, he developed a method of articulation.

This method integrates the dialectic between abstraction and empiricism since, starting from an abstract and simple level of analysis, it proposes step by step movement towards new planes of analysis leading to more concrete-complex levels (Jessop, 1982: 213–220). In this sense, before analyzing the democratizing effect of Basque trade unionism on a specific level, we believe that it is necessary to begin with the prior, more abstract, and simple step of understanding what the state and neoliberal governmentality are. Subsequently, adding more levels of analysis will bring us closer to the object of our research in a more concrete and complex engagement.

Continuing, the break between agency and structures maintains a logic similar to that described earlier. The pluralist tradition begins with the work of Richardson and early Jordan, who demonstrate absolute confidence that actors gradually integrate structural elements. A second phase is marked by the neo-pluralism of Charles Lindblom and the “late” work of Robert Dahl (Simón, 2004: 460). It was Joe Migdal, in his attempt to limit the impact of “neo-statism” within pluralism, who succeeded in integrating the dichotomy of agency and structure, recognizing the reality of political institutions and even the performative importance of different conceptions and images with respect to these (ibid.: 461).

In a similar vein, the abstraction of Althusser and Poulantzas is closely linked to their epistemological reliance on structures in which actors are nothing more than a reflection of the relations of production (Ritzer, 2001: 179). Jessop rejects both the determinism of this approach and the reductionism of theories such as that of Holmwood and Stewart’s sturcturation. He integrates structure and agency in an original way. In his opinion, we must consider the structurally inscribed strategic selectivity of the structures and the actions of actors as strategically calculated and structurally oriented (Jessop, 1996: 124). We depict a synthesis of these ideas in the following diagram (Fig. 1):

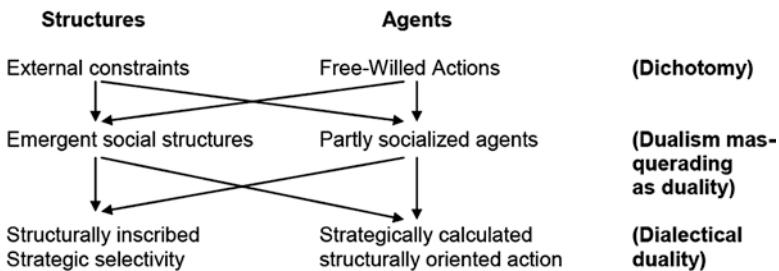


Fig. 1 Structure-agency beyond structuration theory (Source: Jessop, 1996: 124)

An analysis of social actors, in our case unions, and of contemporary democracy, must integrate both a strategic perspective on structure and take into account this structural dimension of agency. As we will see later, among other things, this is essential for understanding the process of building a demos and a nation differentiated from that of a matrix state, as is the case in Basque Country.

Finally, with regard to the division between society and the state, unlike the ruptures described in other cases, pluralism and structuralism have undergone a process of parallel evolution from an absolute prioritization of society to an integration of both dimensions. While pluralism rejected the concept of the state and prioritized concepts such as “social groups” or “political systems,” structuralism prioritized the economic and social dimensions of the capitalist system (Simón, 2004: 462). In this sense, despite the fact that Althusser and Poulantzas attributed a certain autonomy to the state, in the end, it maintained an epiphenomenal or secondary role in the interests of the capitalist system (*idem*).

In this case, it is once again Migdal and Jessop who overcame this dichotomy and integrated both dimensions. In their opinion, a static perspective cannot be maintained since state apparatuses and practices are materially interdependent on other institutional orders and social practices (Jessop, 2008: 5). In this sense, both dimensions are inseparable since the state is socially integrated, and the “appearance” of such division is the result of contemporary state-building processes (Mitchell, 1991: 95).

Given this reading, when speaking about the state, we cannot understand it as a “thing” or an “object” and limit ourselves to its institutional construction. Nor, however, is it an entirely active subject with a life of its own. It is also not a passive tool at the service of a dominant actor who uses it in their own interests, nor a neutral actor which acts as an arbiter between different social interests (Jessop, 2016: 54). Following the definition offered by Poulantzas, the state is a social relationship determined by its form (1979 [2014]: 154). This, beyond questions of definition, has far-reaching effects when studying contemporary unionism and its influence on democratization processes.

Therefore, the state is not structure and society agents. The state is not essence and accumulation, and agents are not only action and contingency. The state is not a representation of the universal and people a particular instance (Goikoetxea, 2014, 2017).

Defining the state as a social relationship implies that the exercise of state power assumes a condensation determined by the shape of the changing balance of forces (Jessop, 2008: 46). According to Jessop, “State power reflects the prevailing balance of forces, mediated by the state apparatus with its structurally inscribed strategic selectivity” (*idem*). From this perspective, “the state can be defined as a set of institutions, organizations, social forces and activities, embedded and socially regulated, strategically selected and organized around decision-making that is collectively binding for an imagined political community” (*idem*).

Jessop understands by strategic selectivity the way in which the state, read as a social ensemble, has a specific and differentiated impact on the capacity of different political forces to pursue their interests and particular strategies in specific

spatiotemporal contexts (*idem*). As a result of this selectivity, it is more open to certain interests, practices, and discourses than to others.

As the British researcher indicates, “It is necessary to pay close attention to the structurally inscribed strategic selectivity of state forms and specific political regimes and to move away from abstract and often essentialist theorizing in favor of more detailed versions of the complex interactions between institutions and social struggles” (*ibid.*: 48–49).

In this sense, power is not exercised by the state as such, but depends on the balance of forces both within society, understood in a broad sense, and within state apparatus themselves. As we have indicated, society and the state are not two separate dimensions that are opposed to each other. When studying the state, we must understand it in a wider sense (Gramsci, 1981), taking into consideration the complex interaction between what we label society and what we understand as the state. This, in our case, is of great importance since unionism acts strategically to advance its position within institutional structures and tries to use these to “govern” society and generate “state effects” on it.¹ Furthermore, we must include social mobilization, not only of political parties, but also of unions and other types of social movements that are fundamental in any process of democratization.

3 Foucault and Neoliberal Governmentality

When defining neoliberalism, we find ourselves confronting a concept that has been used so widely and in such diverse contexts that it sometimes appears to be an empty shell lacking in analytical usefulness. Any attempt to define a complex phenomenon will always be selective, so there is no neutral or objective understanding (Jessop, 2008: 2). In our case, we use a Foucauldian perspective on governmentality to approach the idea of neoliberal government, continuing our analysis at an abstract level.

Michel Foucault set out to study the microphysics of power, those concrete, dispersed, and heterogeneous practices of power, from a perspective “from below” (Foucault, 2008: 95). It is through an analysis of these practices that Foucault develops the concept of governmentality and subsequently a concept of government and the state. In a similar way, we reject the a priori reification of supposedly universal concepts such as the state, society, the market, or civil society, which grant them their own essences. In fact, they can only be explained as a result of concrete practices of power (Foucault, 2008: 17). The most appropriate analytical framework to approach these relationships is the concept of governmentality (Foucault, 2008: 186).

In general, governmentality addresses the way in which people’s behavior is shaped (*idem*). It is simultaneously external and internal to the state, because it is

¹The development of welfare policy is, for example, is one of the most common state effects in contemporary democratization processes.

governmental tactics themselves that define what is and what is not under the control of the state (Foucault, 2006: 136). Based on this, instead of understanding neoliberalism as a mere colonization of the economy or a withdrawal of the state, we must define this apparent “end of politics” as a political program (Lemke, 2007: 45).

3.1 Neoliberal Governmentality as a New Rationality

Unlike classical liberal governments, “laissez-faire” is one of the fundamental principles of neoliberal governmentality. The problem no longer consists of the autonomy of the economy, but in deciding how political and social powers should be articulated to shape the market economy (Cotoi, 2011: 113). There is a shift in focus from exchange to competition, which is why “laissez-faire” becomes a naturalistic naivety insofar as competition is not a given natural fact but the effect of artificially constructed conditions (Foucault, 2008: 120). Competition emerges as a result of continuous effort, of the incessant work of active governmentality (Cotoi, 2011: 113).

In this context, state intervention is required that is not directed at the market, but at the conditions of possibility of the market economy (Read, 2009: 28). Therefore, the key axis is not intervention in the market, but in the social fabric, so that the mechanism of competition can expand and multiply at all levels and in all regions of the social body (Cotoi, 2011: 114). The objective is not so much a society subject to the effect of merchandise, but to competitive dynamics, not a supermarket society but a company society (Foucault, 2008: 147).

Above all, neoliberal governmentality offers us a new rationality, a new “political knowledge” that is neither neutral nor simply representative of the governed reality (Lemke, 2002: 59). It is not an external influence but an element of government itself that helps to create a discursive field in which the exercise of power is “rational” (idem). Therefore, it functions as a “regime of truth,” producing new forms of knowledge, inventing new notions and concepts that contribute to the governance of new domains of regulation and intervention (Idem).

In this sense, we observe that different organizations such as the IMF, the World Bank, the EU, UNESCO, and national and local institutions use similar discourses in which the free market, good governance, responsible action and accountability are emphasized (Joseph, 2014: 12). In different areas, including poverty reduction, state reconstruction projects and even European Union projects, ideas such as “devolution of powers,” “local responsibility,” “partnership,” “co-responsibility,” “governance networks,” and “active citizenship” constantly emerge (idem). Why? Despite being applied in very different contexts, these projects are very similar to each other because they are molded by the same dominant rationality, that established by neoliberal governmentality (idem).

The call for open and decentralized governance, facilitating action from a distance, becomes evident here. There is a rejection of direct action and control by sovereign authorities. However, governing from a distance requires new technologies of power and is from this need that we understand the rise of new instruments,

such as governance, New Public Management, the promotion of active citizenship, NGOs and other types of non-governmental actors, and the involvement of civil society in order to achieve a “more democratic” and “efficient” government (Kohler-Koch, 2007: 255).

We believe that a Foucauldian perspective on governmentality offers us a useful instrument to understand what underlies many of the changes that have occurred over recent decades, their rationality and how they work. This said, the theory of hegemony better explains how and why they have become dominant (Joseph, 2014: 12). This perspective is more useful when approaching the general institutional context, the role of class forces, how particular interests are represented, and how different political projects are constructed (ibid.: 9). In turn, governmentality is driven by states, in states, and through states (ibid.: 12). In a two-way dialogue, the state shapes new forms of governmentality, and the latter in turn shape the state (ibid.: 12). This is the context in which we situate the current question of the privatization of democracy.

4 Neoliberalism and the Privatization of Democracy

Our theoretical premise as regards to the link between the state and democracy is that the complex of structures, practices, techniques and relationships that we call the state can be effective in creating and reproducing violence. They can also, therefore, be much more effective in creating welfare, inclusion, and equity. This difference in approaching not just the state, but the regime of existence of any social object is highly significant when analyzing power relations and the effects of these relations in shaping society, individuals, and any type of community.

To propose democratization without a state and people, as neoliberals and liberal cosmopolitans do when speaking about postnational and post-sovereign democratic global governance, would require a new perspective, approach, or theory of democracy. These theories would have to demonstrate that equalization and empowerment or capacitation is possible without public structures and public territories (where public refers to peoples), that is, without communities, nations, and peoples’ sovereignty and, again, without people’s institutional-legal-political capacity (Goikoetxea, 2014). New theories would also have to show that capitalism, the economic system proposed, can work without states and peoples. No one has explained how capital can produce more capital without the free labor that women and the state provide, through public institutions, or without the entire legal-authoritative and binding platform of the juridical and executive branches of the state, not to mention the public infrastructure through which capital circulates.

“The modern worker,” “the industrial worker,” and “the financial capitalist” are all specific historical subjects, and in order to create them, it is necessary to modulate-regulate bodies. In short, certain bodies and social groups have to be subjected to a specific production line and discursive framework. A specific art of government is necessary, and only the state, understood as a complex of public structures

and strategies, has been able to provide and, more importantly, keep on providing this. No market, global governance system, international commerce arrangement, free enterprise or individual has ever provided welfare for the community in a structural and sustainable way, as has been achieved through public structures and strategies.

We define public structures and strategies according to the SRA approach (Jessop, 2008). Thus, we include public education, health, public services and all those goods which we consider public, including water, air, energy, roads, and railways, provided and managed by one or more of the public networks, institutions, or publicly trained workers or freely cared-for and fed individuals, plus those institutions which are publicly financed or certificated, including unions, parties, and any other types of association. The state is not just the parliament, the police, and the juridical system. The state is not just the privileged domain of the dominant class since there is no one privileged class, and hence, there is more than one political struggle or class conflict. The reduction of the state to a violent nucleus of power or to the tool of the dominant class is the consequence of an old – antiquated – patriarchal and liberal state-phobia, which perceives the state and power as something “bad,” the family as something “good,” the individual as morally rational, and the community as a space of freedom (Goikoetxea, 2017). The state is an effect of power rather than its origin, but because it is a structured and a structuring set of social phenomena, it is not only an effect but also a point of (re)production which the concept of “cause” does not entirely encompass. Social objects are both objective and subjective, in the sense that they are not only institutionalized or objectified power relations but also beliefs, perception, and discourses which generate our meaningful world and, therefore, these very power relations. The regime of existence of social phenomena cannot be reduced to dichotomies of cause/effect according to propositional or elemental logic, since in many instances, effects articulate their own causes a posteriori, because causes are meaning effects.

Proposals to address both global and European democratic deficits are based on the premise that democracy can work without sovereignty. National, popular, and state sovereignty are being rejected by most liberal thinkers as mechanisms for democratizing contemporary society. Our premise is that the set of public structures we call the state, along with the theory and practices of popular and state-sovereignty, are fundamental to democratization. Among other factors, this is because the less institutional and constitutional power a political community has, the less sovereignty that community will be able to acquire, and hence the less reproductive power it will have for maintaining itself across time and space as a self-governed community. It can be seen how and why these local territorial assemblages we call *demoi* require a type of power we may call sovereignty as long as we understand sovereignty in terms of the institutional and territorialized political capacity a community has for self-government, where the ultimate objective is emancipation.

This way of understanding sovereignty implies moving away from liberal conceptions of both sovereignty and institutional political power. It is time to go beyond industrial statism and liberal democracy. Democratization cannot be limited to enfranchising people but must also include how public education (compulsory for

everyone) and health care (for instance) are implemented and how they modulate and empower individual and collective bodies for self-government and emancipation. To this end, we need to bear in mind the political and public decision-making capacity that certain Basque territories have relied upon to reproduce themselves and survive as democracies and not as mere national, cultural, or economic regions. In those territories where the conditions for local democratization exist, the Basque nation has been reproduced as a demos, while in those territories where these conditions are absent, the Basque nation is disappearing. All political identities and loyalties require resources and a certain level of institutionalization or formalization, in order to reproduce themselves.

The multidimensional and multiscale process of global privatization involves the creation of new spaces, and this reterritorialization and deterritorialization includes unsettled and uneven processes of de-democratization not only outside but also within the same bounded politico-institutional space where the traditional role of democratizing institutions such as unions is transformed.

One example of this privatization is the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) agreement. The TTIP free trade agreement is being negotiated between the European Union and the United States of America. With the creation of a free trade agreement between two world powers, we can see what Sassen (2008) calls the “denationalization of territory” and what we call the “privatization of democracy.” States actively give up their authority to supranational entities organized independently of popular sovereignty and act in the interests of the market and private companies. Changes in international law and the impact this has on the sovereign laws of nation-states, plus the opacity of the negotiations and the transfer of political power to the executive and corporations, mean not only privatizing the state but also de-politicizing the demands of the working classes and population in general for inclusion and welfare.

The union was a privileged actor in interactions with the state during Fordism. It acted as the representative of the interests of the workers in the welfare state by means of tripartite negotiations between the state, employers, and unions. In post-Fordist globalization, social dialogue is transformed into bilateral negotiations between capital and state, which is subsequently translated into direct employer–employee negotiations. However, in this negotiation, the price of labor is decided entirely by the market and by the capital–employer combination. Getting rid of unions means that workers have no leverage, and as a result, the social contract takes on many of the inequitable characteristics of the sexual contract as described by Pateman (1995). Thus, at this stage, there is at least one certainty: unionism has been a democratizing phenomenon, but unless it changes its structures, practices, type of organization and discourses, it may cease to be so.

5 Trade Unionism as a Democratizing Agent

Unionism has been defined on occasions as a second-level agent, a kind of intermediary agent between the working class and employers and/or the state that responds to a context external to the union itself, defined by capital (Offe, 1997; Hyman, 2007). Progressively more authors have recognized the capacity of unionism to act strategically (Hyman, 2007; Alonso, 2009; Schmalz et al., 2018), that is, not just as subject to but also capable of reproducing a given reality. To remain consistent with a strategic-relational approach, we must understand unions as a state institution.

Following the Polanyian logic of the double movement (Polanyi, 1944; Fraser, 2013), unions and union action are a fundamental part of the axis of social protection or “community” against the market or *laissez-faire*. Forms of neoliberal governmentality base their forms of capital accumulation on the financialization of the economy, austerity policies and debt as a “new” element of social reproduction against wages. They undo the demos – limited and based on the industrial working class – on which the community axis has been built (Alonso, 2009; Sassen, 2014; Brown, 2015).

In the case of the Basque Country, the process of institutionalization of trade unionism took place in the mid-1970s, after the death of the dictator Francisco Franco and just at the moment when neoliberal governmentality began to develop worldwide. One of the milestones in the institutionalization of unions in the Spanish State was the so-called Moncloa Pacts of 1979. In addition to different political parties, employers’ associations and unions (initially only CCOO but subsequently the UGT) also participated.

These pacts were not just economic agreements aimed at establishing a social peace to accompany the transition from dictatorship. They symbolized the agreements reached between the old political and economic elites favorable to reform (represented by the government of Adolfo Suarez), the political left (mainly PSOE and PCE) and trade unions (as in the case of CCOO). The accords also included elements of moderate nationalism (PNV and CiU) and the right (Alianza Popular). In short, the pacts brought together the set of old and new elites that were to take a central role in the governmentality of Spain and that would constitute the basis for a new power bloc throughout post-transition governments (Petras, 1990; Calvo, 2015; Azkune, 2018).

This historical moment highlights the divergence between Spanish and Basque unionism. Spanish unions are service-offering (housing, training, etc.) entities financed almost entirely (around 85–88%) by the central state. In Basque Country, unions provide only legal services and support. Furthermore, in the case of ELA, the Basque majority union, 90% of its funding comes from its own members and only 10% from the Basque government. These features may help to explain why Basque unionism can be more polemic and swing intermittently from contentious to institutional politics.

5.1 *The Basque Trade Union Majority*

The Basque union panorama is made up, broadly speaking, of four large unions. The UGT and CCOO (which has around 54,000 affiliates in the Basque Country) operate at the level of the matrix state. ELA and LAB operate only in subordinate states.² Although the evolution of the strategies of the different unions has been unstable, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the so-called Basque union majority began to take shape. It includes ELA (41.32% share of union membership) and LAB (19.64%), as well as other small unions.³ Outside this majority are the unions CCOO (18.42%) and the UGT (10.35%). The Basque union majority, in any case, has taken on a more social and political role, centered on a project for the subordinate state and maintaining competitive strategies in the labor sphere (Letamendia, 2009: 96; Elorrieta, 2012: 110).

A high level of union membership and a difference in composition with respect to the Spanish demos have allowed for a similarly different distribution of capital – economic, social, and cultural. It should be noted that the more confrontational strategies deployed by the majority of the Basque trade unions with respect to the state – as opposed to the institutional tendencies of the UGT and CCOO – have favored the signing of more advantageous collective agreements for workers. In this way, the Basque demos and BSIs are (re)produced with capacities and objectives different from those of the matrix state (Goikoetxea, 2013).

If all agents, including trade unions, behave strategically, they do so “according to a logic that is not abstract or ideal, but rather a historical product that always expresses symbolic operating identities” (Alonso, 2009: 24). In the Basque case, the center-periphery conflict also cuts across union strategies (Kaiero, 1991; Letamendia, 2009: 96). Ultimately, some unions are constituted as state institutions of the matrix state and others of the subordinate state. In this sense, beyond the representation of the “community” axis by the unions, these, through union pillarization, represent an (ideologically) specific part of the community itself: ELA as a union linked to the PNV (Basque Nationalist Party – Christian Democrat), LAB as the union branch of the Basque National Liberation Movement, CCOO as the union linked to the PCE (Communist Party of Spain), and the UGT with the PSOE (Socialist Party). Even if de-pillarization, especially in the ELA and CCOO unions (radical in the first case), facilitates some flexibility in union strategy, the relevance of the Basque Country as a separate territory has maintained universal strategic relevance.

²We are making use here of the idea developed by Azkune (2018) in which the matrix state would be Spain and the subordinate state entities would be, in this case, the Basque Autonomous Community and Navarra. These are not to be considered stateless nations because they have state structures. The relationship of material, strategic and discursive dependency is what makes them subaltern with respect to the matrix state.

³Data with respect to the union elections held up until the 12-31-2019 in the CAPV and collected in the annual Socio-Labor Information presented by the Council of Labor Relations of the Basque Country.

Thus, although the Spanish Constitution approved in 1978 places labor relations within the jurisdiction of the matrix state, at the beginning of the 1980s, what we can call a Basque proto-framework of labor relations was developed, based on the autonomy of different parts of the tripartite model: a Basque government that seeks to expand its jurisdiction, a high, predominantly nationalist union membership, and the institutionalization of a Basque employer's association (Kaiero, 1999; Kortabarria, 2015: 44–46).

The autonomous framework of labor relations, which provoked a rejection by the UGT and suspicion by CCOO (Kaiero, 1991), disappeared after different waves of centralization, which began with the approval of the Workers' Statute in 1980 and continued through the approval of different labor reforms after the economic crisis of 2008 (Kaiero, 1999; Elorrieta, 2012; Goikoetxea, 2013; Calvo, 2015).

However, the expulsion of the unions from the Basque subaltern state did occur not only in terms of what can be labeled their "institutional power" but also in the "structural" or economic sphere (Schmalz et al., 2018). The majority of Basque trade unions follow different strategies for collective bargaining and prioritize different areas. However, this universal trend is unmistakable when we observe the evolution of the Basque labor market – including unpaid work. It is characterized by the loss of industrial employment, an increase in "atypical" contracts that are applied principally to women and workers in traditionally less unionized sectors, as well as the intensification of unpaid work (Petras, 1990; Elorrieta, 2012; Goikoetxea, 2013; Calvo, 2015; Azkune, 2018; Goikoetxea et al., 2020).

5.2 *A Democratization Tied to Territory*

How has the Basque union majority responded to this expulsion? Beyond internal adjustments aimed at achieving greater organizational power (Hyman, 2007; Letamendia, 2009; Elorrieta, 2012), the answer has been a radicalization of the answer has been a process of radicalization and a strategy of delegitimization (McAdam et al., 2001: 146) of tripartite institutions. The tripartite institutions gradually abandoned include Hobetuz (the Basque Foundation for Continuous Professional Training), Osalan (the Basque Institute for Occupational Health and Safety), the Basque Labor Relations Council, and the Economic and Social Council.

One of the main conflicts is around ongoing professional training. A neo-statist Basque model, negotiated between the Basque government and the union majority, faces off against a neo-communitarian model imposed by the matrix state, with support from the UGT and CCOO and unions, Spanish employers, and the Spanish government (Kaiero, 1999; Jessop, 2008; Kortabarria, 2015).

Two documents presented by ELA⁴ and LAB⁵ indicate that this abandonment of social dialogue is not ideological, but rather a form of denunciation and pressure. It is part of a strategy that seeks to institutionalize an effective social dialogue with a real capacity to make change – at the local territorial level of decision-making – as well as to integrate the interests of the social classes that they represent. ELA and LAP also point out the illegitimacy of agreements negotiated with the union minority, polarizing – in the sense indicated by McAdam et al. (2001: 322) – positions against the tripartite model.

This polarization is not unilateral. From the union minority associated with the Spanish state, positions have been taken in favor of stripping ELA and LAB of their legal recognition as trade unions for their rejection of tripartite institutions.⁶

The desertion goes beyond the tripartite institutions and polarizes positions regarding the Basque Statute of Autonomy. This statute was initially supported by ELA but finally rejected in 1997. Through this process, a new structure of political opportunity emerged (Meyer, 2004) which took shape in the alliance between ELA and LAB in 1999. This alliance made possible what became known as the Lizarra Accords, which were to pave the way for a peace process based on various agreements between political, union, and social majorities. However, this process would later weaken after the failure of these agreements. However, the economic crisis of 2009 facilitated a new alliance between the two trade union organizations (Elorrieta, 2012; Letamendia, 2013; Kortabarria, 2015).

5.3 *Communitarian Statism*

The social response to the crisis of 2009 was based not only on the ELA and LAB unions but also on different small unions and multiple social movements (Letamendia, 2013). José Elorrieta (2012: 110), a researcher on trade unionism and former general secretary of ELA, adduced the need for collective identities that would allow the creation of a hegemonic alternative to the current system. The coordination of unions through the National Assembly of Social and Trade Union Movements of Euskal Herria fulfilled, in part, that brokerage function (Vasi, 2011). This was a part of a two-sided process: a search for bottom-up recognition of trade unionism and expanding the window of opportunity through the participation of more social agents.

⁴“Eusko Jaurlaritzaren Elkarrizketa Sozialari buruzko agiriaren balorazioa”. <http://www.mrafundazioa.eus/eu/dokumentazio-zentrua/beste-dokumentuak/eusko-jaurlaritzaren-elkarrizketa-sozialari-buruzko-agiriaren-balorazioa> [Accessed: 2020/09/30].

⁵“Jaurlaritzaren elkarrizketa sozialaren mahaia osatzeko proposamenean ez dago eredu berririk”. <http://www.lab.eus/negoiazio-kolektiboa/3786-jaurlaritzaren-elkarrizketa-sozialaren-mahaia-osatzeko-proposamenean-ez-dago-eredu-berriri> [Accessed: 2020/09/30].

⁶“The controversy over the illegalization” of ELA and LAB reaches the Social Dialogue Table. https://cadenaser.com/emisora/2014/11/28/ser_vitoria/1417197261_029272.html.

Both as a response to the crisis and in order to present an alternative to neoliberal governmentality, the Basque union majority and a wide variety of social movements launched the “Charter of Social Rights of Basque Country.” This “radical agenda” (Bedin, 2017) addressed the axes of social protection and emancipation (Fraser, 2013), combining neo-statist proposals (Jessop, 2008), which demanded intervention and active regulation through BSIs, and neo-community initiatives (idem), giving ample space to the social and solidarity economy.

This radical agenda, agreed upon through the Assembly of Social and Trade Union Movements of the Basque Country and born of a decentralized participatory process throughout the Basque territory, gave birth to a proposal for alternative governability. It also represented, explicitly, a tool for conflict and mobilization against the dominant order. An example of the centrality of conflict and mobilization to the proposal is the fact that the charter was launched by way of a general strike on May 30, 2013, part of a run of eight general strikes since 2008, the most recent being the feminist general strike of May 8, 2018.

The attempt to reterritorialize power and the search for a new form of statist-communitary governmentality is, therefore, linked to conflict and politicization. It has enjoyed more success in terms of mobilization than, for example, the “European general strike” called by the UGT and CCOO, which was part of an attempt to apply pressure at a transnational level.

Beyond the democratizing effect of the proposal, it should be noted that this new agenda has also had an influence not only on the social power of unionism through facilitating coalitions but also on their organizational power. It has democratized unionism itself, focusing on the ever-increasing number of “atypical” workers and popular sectors, as well as opening the debate on transformative subjects.

6 Conclusion

We believe that, whatever its concrete institutional articulation, democracy will always mean “the government of the rulers according to the expressed preferences and demands of the demos” (Goikoetxea, 2014: 146). So far, sovereignty is still the social relation that articulates that democratic interaction between the government and its demos. Nevertheless, general trends indicate that the means to articulate that very relation have been progressively coopted into private hands, disempowering the access of popular forces. Neoliberal governmentality as a new political rationality is a necessary grid of intelligibility to understand the regime of truth that lies behind most of the changes mentioned (Foucault, 2008: 243). This is why we think that whatever claims might be made about the empowerment of civil society and new democratic governance, the loss of sovereignty and the privatization of democracy is its *raison d’être*.

Nonetheless, we must not forget that democracy must be understood as a relational process in which democratization and de-democratization constantly interact. Instead of using absolute terms, we would rather talk about trends. Thus, we are not

saying that democracy has been completely privatized or that the state is authoritarian in every aspect. However, we believe that those features related to the privatization of democracy are ecologically dominant (Jessop, 2000).

In that regard, we have emphasized the role played by Basque unions in terms of democratization, understood as a process whereby the people get to govern themselves.

Certainly, many mechanisms other than brokerage and structures of discursive and political opportunity have come into play both to include some of Basque majority unionism's demands in Basque public politics and to consolidate the Basque sphere of collective bargaining. Polarization, radical opposition and mobilization have been crucial factors leading to a union membership rate of 25% – far behind Northern European countries, but ahead of France and Spain, where it averages around 10%.

Nonetheless, while these mechanisms have increased equality among certain workers, inequality between groups has increased, as in other European countries. In 1993, Basque workers' income was 54.7% of GDP. It dropped to 48% in 2007 despite the fact that during this period, the BAC's GDP increased by around 150% (Goikoetxea, 2017: 218). Currently, the percentage of workers' income vis-à-vis GDP is dropping dramatically. Thus, as noted earlier, Basque democratization is not linear, and despite the current wave of de-democratization in terms of economic inequality and public incapacity, collective bargaining has so far been an essential mechanism not only for distributing wealth, resources and opportunities but also for negotiating a particular system of access to resources which differs from the Spanish one, and by means of which Basque unionism has steadily been incorporated into many people's trust networks. This has in turn enabled unions to monitor Basque government activity and make the Basque workers' collective voice heard. This means that institutional recognition, brokerage and collective bargaining have enabled Basque unionism to articulate objective socioeconomic differences as political distinctions. However, unions are being attacked by employers and corporations in general and executives in particular across Europe and the world, with the aim of disarticulating the working class so that it cannot unionize and mobilize against the global process of privatizing democracy.

Consequently, we insist that the institutionalization of a Basque collective bargaining sphere implies the existence of specifically Basque working classes; classes distinct from others in that they occupy not just a different territory, but a distinct space (Lefebvre, 1991), a distinct political field with its own organizational structures, governing systems, institutional representation, and socioeconomic regime (Jessop, 2008: 122; Poulantzas, 1979 [2014]: 40–45). On the other hand, having a territory with a differentiated political capacity, in accordance with which socioeconomic and cultural capital is distributed, entails the existence of differentiated social and political entities. These entities are characterized not only by objective socioeconomic differences (those who work in the BAC have different production rates, workdays, levels of education, health, salaries, and pensions) but also by political distinctions, since “what is at stake that lies behind the way in which work and health are regulated is the particular understanding given to the ‘common’ of the

community” (Rancière, 2010: 58). It is on these particular understandings that political distinctions flourish – distinctions that reproduce and are reproduced by material and objectified differences upon which diverse states, nations, and demos are constituted.

The objective and the idea of democratic governance and popular sovereignty has always been to ensure that the people reproduce themselves as they see fit. To use the term nation, demos, society, commune, or community does not change this fact.

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Part II
New Practices of Citizenship in Emerging
Scales and Frameworks of Western
Democracy

Postpandemic Technopolitical Democracy: Algorithmic Nations, Data Sovereignty, Digital Rights, and Data Cooperatives



Igor Calzada 

Abstract COVID-19 has hit citizens dramatically during 2020, not only creating a general risk-driven environment encompassing a wide array of economic vulnerabilities but also exposing them to pervasive digital risks, such as biosurveillance, misinformation, and e-democracy algorithmic threats. Over the course of the pandemic, a debate has emerged about the appropriate democratic and technopolitical response when governments use disease surveillance technologies to tackle the spread of COVID-19, pointing out the dichotomy between state-Leviathan cyber-control and civil liberties. The COVID-19 pandemic has inevitably raised the need to resiliently and technopolitically respond to democratic threats that hyperconnected and highly virialised societies produce. In order to shed light on this debate, amidst this volume on “democratic deepening”, this chapter introduces the new term “postpandemic technopolitical democracy” as a way to figure out emerging forms and scales for developing democracy and citizen participation in hyperconnected and highly virialised postpandemic societies. Insofar as the digital layer cannot be detached from the current democratic challenges of the twenty-first century including neoliberalism, scales, civic engagement, and action research-driven co-production methodologies; this chapter suggests a democratic toolbox encompassing four intertwined factors including (i) the context characterised by the algorithmic nations, (ii) challenges stemming from data sovereignty, (iii) mobilisation seen from the digital rights perspective, and (iv) grassroots innovation embodied through data cooperatives. This chapter elucidates that in the absence of coordinated and interdependent strategies to claim digital rights and data sovereignty by algorithmic

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nations, on the one hand, big tech data-opolies and, on the other hand, the GDPR led by the European Commission might bound (negatively) and expand (positively) respectively, algorithmic nations' capacity to mitigate the negative side effects of the algorithmic disruption in Western democracies.

Keywords Technopolitics · Democracy · Postpandemic · COVID · Citizenship · Algorithmic nations · Data sovereignty · Digital rights · Data cooperatives · Social innovation · GDPR · Cooperatives · Vulnerabilities · Brexit · Biosurveillance · Misinformation · Technological sovereignty · Digital sovereignty · Cybercontrol · Civil liberties · Foundational economy

1 Introduction: Amidst Postpandemic Technopolitical Democracy

Citizens worldwide have likely been pervasively surveilled during and probably as a result of the COVID-19 crisis by further exacerbating neoliberalism-driven data extractivist global patterns (Aho & Duffield, 2020; Csernaton, 2020; Hintz et al., 2017; Kitchin, 2020; Zuboff, 2019). Alongside this pervasive global process, despite the fact that vaccination programmes have sped up, its equitable distribution globally cannot be ensured yet (Burki, 2021). As such, the coronavirus does not discriminate and affects citizens translocally, yet it has unevenly distributed economic and social impacts across and within state borders, producing a new pandemic citizenship regime that exposes health, socio-economic, cognitive, and even digital vulnerabilities (Calzada, 2020c).

By contrast, the COVID-19 pandemic has also shown that digital platforms and transformations can offer opportunities to connect with local communities even during times of crisis for subnational and city-regional entities that attempt to ensure data commons (Tommaso, 2020) and data sovereignty (Calzada, 2020b; Hummel et al., 2021). But how can e-democracy be ensured for all citizens while also creating further democratic citizenship (Bridle, 2016; Lucas, 2020) to avert the algorithmic and data-opolitic (data oligopolies; Hand, 2020; Rikap, 2020; Stucke & Grunes, 2017) extractivist hegemonic paradigm as well as Orwellian cybercontrol through massive contract-tracing apps that serve as a digital panopticon of the Leviathan (Datta et al., 2020; Gekker & Hind, 2019; Kostka, 2019; Nichols & LeBlanc, 2020; Taylor, 2020)? How can citizens from stateless city-regional nations react to these unprecedented challenges and equip themselves with the best tools (Calzada, 2018b; Delacroix & Lawrence, 2019) to claim digital rights and data sovereignty (Calzada, 2019a)? What does sovereignty mean for stateless citizens (Calzada, 2018a, b; Zabalo et al., 2016; Zabalo & Iraola, 2020) amidst the pandemic crisis wrapped in an algorithmic global disruption (Dixson-Declève, 2020)?

The COVID-19 pandemic has stressed the growing democratic impact of digital technologies in political and social life (Cheney-Lippold, 2011; Datta, 2020). Contact-tracing applications—and more recently though vaccine passports and biometric technologies—on mobile phones have raised a vibrant debate and epitomised the magnitude of contemporary trends to incorporate algorithmic computation into the government of citizenry. Thus, this crisis has accelerated the need to increase human and social understanding of potential and risk of “*techno-politics*”—the entrenchment of digital technologies in political and governmental practices (Calzada, 2020d, 2021)—for “pandemic citizens” in the stateless algorithmic nations of Europe.

Over the last two decades, the euphoria of the “digital renaissance” and the advent of the Internet as a free network of networks have characterised the dawn of the new millennium. Recent years have witnessed widening concerns about the “surveillance” effects of the digital revolution (Allam, 2020; Andersen, 2020; Christensen, 2019; Christl, 2017; Christl & Spiekermann, 2016; Levy & Barocas, 2018; Lightfoot & Wisniewski, 2014; Lupton & Michael, 2017; Maxmen, 2019; Morozov, 2020; van Dijck, 2014). Expressions like “algocracy”, “digital panopticon”, and “algorithmic surveillance” have revealed a spreading scepticism about the rise of new governance models based on big data analysis and artificial intelligence (AI; Berditchevskaia & Baeck, 2020; Delipetrev et al., 2020; Dyer-Witheford et al., 2019; Lutz, 2019). The Cambridge Analytica scandal in the United Kingdom, on the one hand, and the Chinese Social Credit System (SCS) tracking, controlling, and scoring citizens, on the other hand, have offered dystopian representations of our digital present (Pilkington, 2019). They have exposed the urge to systematically address the question of whether and to what extent ubiquitous “*dataveillance*” is compatible with citizens’ digital rights and democracy (Lupton & Michael, 2017; Smuha, 2020; van Dijck, 2014; Wong, 2020).

Against this backdrop, the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) can be understood as a first attempt to pave the way for a specific European model of ruling on these matters and to take the lead globally in favour of an explicit strategy towards digital rights (Calzada & Almirall, 2020; Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, 2019). A rights-based approach to techno-politics can be articulated by connecting the digital transformation that is reshaping our urban spaces to the notion and institution of citizenship, which has been the main carrier of rights in European societies over the last two centuries (Arendt, 1949). This raises the question of how the algorithmic disruption can redefine citizenship through the incorporation of new digital rights related to the status of a citizen in cyberspace—access, openness, net neutrality, digital privacy, data encryption, protection and control, data sovereignty, and so on (Calzada & Almirall, 2020).

Hence, this chapter suggests a democratic toolbox encompassing four intertwined factors including (i) the postpandemic context characterised by the algorithmic nations, (ii) postpandemic challenges stemming from data sovereignty, (iii) postpandemic mobilisation seen from the digital rights perspective, and (iv) postpandemic grassroots innovation embodied through data cooperatives. This chapter elucidates that in the absence of coordinated and interdependent strategies to claim

digital rights and data sovereignty by algorithmic nations, on the one hand, big tech *data-opolies* and, on the other hand, the *GDPR* led by the European Commission might bound (negatively) and expand (positively) respectively, algorithmic nations' capacity to mitigate the negative side effects of the algorithmic disruption in Western democracies. In doing so, this chapter aims to provide a substantial contribution in this direction by articulating an in-depth investigation into how algorithmic disruption can bring about a new generation of human rights belonging to the digital sphere and how they can be unfolded to address the democratic challenges raised by the spread of claims towards data sovereignty in stateless "algorithmic nations" (Calzada, 2018a).

2 Towards a Postpandemic Technopolitical Democracy: A Democratic Toolbox

Nominally, over the last few decades, globalisation has led to a new class of global citizenship (Calzada, 2020e; Nguyen, 2017). While the access to this global citizenship remains uneven, many have enjoyed unlimited freedom to move, work, and travel. However, COVID-19 has drastically slowed down this global citizenship regime and introduced a new level of ubiquitous vulnerability in global affairs by inciting a new "pandemic citizenship" regime in which citizens—regardless of their locations—share fear, uncertainty, and risks (Taylor, 2020). Furthermore, COVID-19 is deeply and pervasively related to data and AI governance issues, which expose citizens' vulnerabilities in a potential surveillance state and market (Hintz et al., 2017; Morozov, 2020). Under these extreme circumstances, "pandemic citizenship" thus could be described as follows: The postpandemic era has both dramatically slowed down several mundane routines for citizens, such as mobility patterns, and exponentially increased professional pressures, emotional fears, life uncertainties, algorithmic exposure, data-privacy concerns, direct health-related risks, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. These factors depend eminently on the material and living conditions shared by a wide range of citizens regardless of their specific geolocalisation. Pandemic citizenship (Calzada, 2020f), along with the way it should evolve towards a postpandemic technopolitical democracy, inevitably intersects with the content of this volume regarding (i) austerity policies implemented by global neoliberalism, (ii) urban and city-regional scales (Calzada, 2017c), and essentially (iii) demands resilient responses from the bottom-up embodied by grassroots innovation processes.

Actually, the democratic responses to this pandemic emergency have varied extremely from location to location, even within the same nation-state in Europe. It is true that the pandemic has caused many nation-states to lock down, which then boosted online work and the delivery of goods via online platforms, putting further pressure on citizens. But it also allowed many communities and particularly civic groups and activists in stateless city-regional nations in Europe to respond resiliently, pushing forward cooperatives and reinforcing social capital (Calzada, 2020c; Scholz & Calzada, 2021). Among the resilient strategies adopted by governments in

Europe, collective intelligence stemming from a proactive citizen-level response has been highly considered to greatly avoid further dystopian measures that could exacerbate existing social inequalities and technopolitical vulnerabilities among pandemic citizens (Bigo et al., 2019). A particular collective intelligence response emerging in Europe has been the creation of digital cooperatives (Borkin, 2019; Cherry, 2016; McCann & Yazici, 2018), also known as *platform cooperatives* (Scholz, 2016) and data cooperatives (Pentland et al., 2019). However, this is not the only resilient strategy adopted within data-governance models by subnational entities or particularly by stateless nations to devolve data powers for technological sovereignty.

There is a growing consensus in Europe that it is urgent for governments to start filling the same role in the information society that they have traditionally taken in the post-industrial society (Chiusi et al., 2020), not only fixing market failure caused by austerity neoliberal policies but also regulating digital power relations and supervising actual economic interplay among stakeholders (Calzada, 2020a). This does not just mean demanding fair tax payments by the big tech companies and imposing fines when they violate the GDPR or when they abuse their market power (European Commission, 2020). More fundamental issues are at stake that call for government attention beyond public intervention; this chapter refers to it as fostering social innovation among stakeholders in civil societies (Moulaert & MacCallum, 2019) in stateless algorithmic nations (Calzada, 2018b). The COVID-19 crisis has clearly shown that citizens in stateless algorithmic nations are not only highly dependent on data and the economic value it creates but also directly influenced by the technopolitical biosurveillance it generates through the massive control of data by global extractivist and neoliberal platforms (Calzada, 2020g, h, i). The COVID-19 crisis has thus led to an explicit, necessary reevaluation in society of the roles of both state governments and their citizens in extending economic and socially innovative alternatives to digitisation and datafication by devolving data powers to subnational and city-regional levels to ensure civil digital rights and overcome state-centric cyber-control (Calzada, 2017a, b; Loukissas, 2019). In doing so, this chapter introduces and contextualises the democratic toolkit consisting of (i) the context seen from the lenses of algorithmic nations (Calzada, 2018a), (ii) challenges stemming from data sovereignty, (iii) the necessary mobilisation characterised by digital rights, and (iv), ultimately, grassroots innovation processes embodied through data cooperatives.

2.1 *Postpandemic Context: Algorithmic Nations*

In the global political arena driven by the extractive algorithmic kind of governance, big data companies such as Google and Facebook have already assumed many functions previously associated with the nation-state, from cartography to the surveillance of citizens, which deterritorialised pandemic citizenship.

Against this present backdrop, historians contend that the tension between civil liberty and collective health has existed since the early days of disease surveillance,

while how such a controversy comes to an end has been historically contingent. As new technologies that collect and archive personal data from citizens have become available in modern societies, the deployment of information and communication technologies (ICT) in public health has reshaped not only the techniques but also the rationalities upon which disease surveillance is built. Such a shift coincides with the convergence of the fields of public health and security in the post-9/11 era, in which health risks such as infectious pathogens are considered national security threats. Consistent with the security trend, disease surveillance efforts have concentrated on border vigilance to identify and prevent risky entrants that are suspected of carrying deadly viruses.

A traditional public health approach has been pursued to combat COVID-19, involving phases of containment (taking steps to prevent the virus from spreading), delay (implementing measures to reduce the peak of impact), mitigation (providing the health system with necessary support), and research (seeking additional effective measures and care). According to Kitchin (2020), in the early response to COVID-19, there was no sufficient consideration of the consequences on civil liberties, biopolitics, or surveillance capitalism, whether the supposed benefits outweighed any commensurate negative side effects, or whether public health ambitions could be realised while protecting civil liberties. The contact-tracing apps have shown profound implications for privacy, governmentality, control creep, and citizenship, and they reinforce the logic of global neoliberalism through surveillance capitalism.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused something akin to a real social experiment (Prainsack, 2020). It has exposed citizens to unforeseen and unprecedented conditions, forcing them to react in ways unimaginable a few months ago. In relation to AI, data, and the digital infrastructure, which have to be considered together as a sociotechnical package, the pandemic is acting as a boost to AI adoption and digital transition, creating new questions and amplifying doubts over data governance, security, rights, cybercontrol, liberties, and increasing social inequalities. These democratic concerns have produced a debate about not only the bounce-back to pre-COVID-19 normality but also the bounce-forward to a more resilient and fair citizenship through foundational economic principles (Foundational Economy Collective, 2020).

According to a review of literature in surveillance studies and the sociology of public health, contemporary surveillance technologies used for biosecurity purposes largely share three characteristics. First is the logic of preemption: While traditional methods of infectious disease management have mainly rested on the reactive logic of identification and response, health surveillance today operates predictively by modelling possible futures with past and real-time data taken directly from citizens' devices. Second, contemporary public health surveillance technologies invite diverse actors and partnerships in the act of surveilling, along with the widespread institutionalisation of "dataveillance", which operates via decentralised and ubiquitous tracking of digitised information and algorithmic analysis. Third, related to this point, disease surveillance today heavily involves self-tracking practices. The plethora of wearable devices, self-tracking mobile applications, and

digital tools have shifted the relationship between self and body and between those who surveil and those being surveilled. Critical works on self-tracking often pay attention to both its biopolitical and self-care capabilities, which render citizens into pixelated, abstract bodies that can be disciplined as neoliberal subjects, but at the same time provide users a sense of control over their bodies via a playful mode of self-surveillance. Such a perspective relates to this chapter's interest in pandemic citizens' digital rights concerning data sovereignty (Hobbs, 2020). Data sovereignty through well-informed, transparent public action and active social engagement emerges therefore as a crucial issue related to the digital rights of citizens.

As an amplifier of pre-existing concerns about digital rights, the COVID-19 crisis has underlined the absolutely critical role of the governance of digital data in modern societies. Without well-structured and semantically rich data, it is not possible to harness the opportunities afforded by AI, digital transformations, and frontier technologies as such. How data is collected, by whom, for what purpose and how it is accessed, shared, and reused have become central questions during the COVID-19 crisis in relation to citizens' digital rights.

Another critical aspect of data sovereignty relates to cybersecurity. The crisis has shown how threats to stakeholders are taking advantage of the situation, which initially led to a significant increase in observed cyberattacks on both crisis-relevant infrastructure and citizens, clearly affecting the European cybersecurity landscape.

A further element of sovereignty exposed by the lockdown is the dependency on non-European collaborative platforms (Muldoon & Stronge, 2020). These platforms have become a critical layer of the digital infrastructure connecting users, processes, applications, and content. Through their use, citizens provide valuable intelligence to the platform operators for profiling, targeting, and potential manipulation (Mazzucato et al., 2020). Digital and data sovereignty need to include this technological layer as well (Floridi, 2020). A dimension amplified by COVID-19 is the extent to which the AI and the digital transformation exacerbate existing social, economic, political, and geographical inequalities, even within the same nation-state, affecting in particular the most vulnerable segments of society but without providing the appropriate digital tools to empower the elderly, youth, and people from social or economically disadvantaged groups in stateless city-regional algorithmic nations.

Hence, "*algorithmic nations*" in the postpandemic context is presented as a conceptual assemblage, blending technopolitical and city-regional imaginaries, scales, infrastructures, and agencies. An assemblage is not just a mixture of heterogeneous elements (Calzada, 2018a). Assemblage emphasises the different processes that historically produce nation-state rescaling and the possibilities for those conditions for devolution to be reimagined and reimplemented.

Very little has been explored with regard to the mediation of what the algorithmic disruption may mean for city-regional politics and its internal nation-building processes in terms of nation-states being assembled and reassembled by different actors who jostle one another to gain advantage (Zabalo & Iraola, 2020). "Global civil society" assemblages between the binary national and global while overlooking the emergent city-regional technopolitical manifestations by stateless and liquid

citizens supplied with decentralised access, interconnectivity, and simultaneity of transactions demanding direct representation in international fora, even bypassing national-state authority. This is a longstanding cause that has been significantly enabled by global electronic decentralised networking and increasingly filtered through blockchain ledgers. The concept of “algorithmic nations” points to the emergence of a particular type of territoriality in the context of imbrications of digital and non-digital conditions, the fusing of the “algorithmic” with the “national” (seen from a metropolitan rather than an ethnic standpoint; Calzada, 2018b).

This chapter suggests this new factor to refer to the way stateless nations need to approach the postpandemic digital revolution by deepening the technopolitical and democratic perspective: *Algorithmic Nations*. “Algorithmic nations” (Calzada, 2018a, p. 268) refers to “a novel notion, which goes beyond internal discord around plurinationality and quasi-federalism” defined as “(i) a non-deterministic city-regional and technopolitical conceptual assemblage (ii) for a transitional strategic pathway (iii) towards the nation-state rescaling (iv) through three drivers—metropolitanisation, devolution, and the right to decide” (p. 270). This volume revolves in other chapters around democratisation, urbanisation/metropolitanisation, the right to decide, inclusiveness, and resilient collective action networks, among others. This chapter essentially provides a democratic toolkit to incorporate by enhancing a technopolitical perspective that is required in the postpandemic hyperconnected societies.

2.2 *Postpandemic Challenges: Data Sovereignty*

Against the postpandemic backdrop, data sovereignty has transcended global geopolitics and economic to acquire a digital dimension. This is due to the rise of the technology giants whose influence is now impossible to deny, which inevitably rises several democratic concerns. The demise of democracy is clearly already one of the biggest policy challenges of our times, and the undermining of citizens’ digital rights is part of this issue. These include a wide of complex technopolitical issues related to data sovereignty.

When did we lose control over our data and how could we get it back? In the age of digitisation, coping responsibly with data poses a substantial dilemma: on the one hand, there is individually tangible and easily comprehensible added value of personal data processing by public and private-sector institutions. On the other hand, there is more or less abstract idea that individuals, specific groups, or communities should retain control over the handling of their data.

This dilemma shows the need for a debate on data sovereignty in full consideration at the subnational level—namely, stateless algorithmic nations. How are data sovereignty related to claims for further data devolution of stateless algorithmic nations (Calzada, 2021)?

COVID-19 responses have shown the importance of the motto *small is beautiful* (Calzada, 2020i; Thorhallsson, 2006, 2016). Highly decentralised city-regions have

demonstrated the ability to cope better with resilient pandemic responses in established small-state cases, such as New Zealand, Iceland, Ireland, Denmark, Netherlands, Singapore, South Korea, and Slovenia. However, there is an open question regarding how these small entities integrate claims in favour of their citizens' digital rights. More urgently, non-established stateless algorithmic nations may have already started from their main urban drivers to claim these digital rights in order to establish a strategy for their data sovereignty. This is the case in Glasgow and Barcelona, respectively, in Scotland and Catalonia. Having said that, intermediary cities or city-regions lack full sovereignty about digital readiness, infrastructure, and services (cellular and broadband connectivity), which significantly limit their access to financial and non-financial services and more broadly to legislate on matters that directly affect their fellow citizens. The lack of data sovereignty may impact young people in intermediary cities, denying them financing, employment, entrepreneurship, education, and training opportunities offered on digital platforms and locking out many young people and key stakeholders from participating directly in the digital economy and governance.

Against this backdrop, in the data-driven European economy, AI, big data, machine learning, and blockchain technologies are reshaping the notion of citizenship by, on the one hand, pervasively challenging the rescaling of nation-states' fixed dynamics and, on the other hand, demanding a counter-reaction from stateless algorithmic nations to bring the control of data to citizens. Claims to data sovereignty through data commons policy programmes are increasingly emerging in several locations. In the post-GDPR scenario, citizens' data privacy, security, and ownership ultimately need to be protected by localising personal data via grassroots innovation and cooperative platforms as has been the case of Barcelona and Catalonia overall (Calzada, 2018c). How citizenship in small algorithmic stateless nations will be influenced and shaped by the geopolitical dynamics between established big nation-states and big firms is still unfolding. Consequently, how could citizens' liquid data and digital rights be protected through further empowerment to avoid digital dissent and dystopia? How will stateless nations face the uneven interaction between AI devices and citizens without having the appropriate sovereign digital tools to protect their fellow citizens? Full democracy in stateless nations can only survive as long as citizens are able to make better choices than machines owned by big techs that actually are becoming more powerful than even established nation-states. Newly emerged global geopolitics, known as AI nationalism, should inevitably have full consideration in this debate as a way to shape the lives of citizens in stateless algorithmic nations. In this direction, new versions of the e-state in Estonia may already offered interesting ways to deal with these uncertainties, taking the lead from the public sector. However, the civilian push is a component that should not be omitted, as the grassroots innovation element actually legitimates a technopolitical claims around digital rights. Another aspect is the impact of the disruptive algorithmic technology called *blockchain* on state-governance schemes. Is it possible to foresee stateless algorithmic nations claiming their technological sovereignty through decentralised governance schemes such as *blockchain*? Amidst the deep influence of *dataism*, stateless

algorithmic nations should establish an alternative technopolitical discourse on citizens' digital and data rights.

2.3 *Postpandemic Mobilisation: Digital Rights*

In the backdrop of these subtle reactions in stateless nations, a wide range of stakeholders in cities and regions are debating the digital rights of citizens through accountable data ethics. This chapter distinguishes 15 digital rights as follows: (i) the right to be forgotten on the Internet, (ii) the right to be unplugged, (iii) the right to one's own digital legacy, (iv) the right to protect one's personal integrity from technology, (v) the right to freedom of speech on the Internet, (vi) the right to one's own digital identity, (vii) the right to the transparent and responsible usage of algorithms (Janssen et al., 2020), (viii) the right to have a last human oversight in expert-based decision-making processes, (ix) the right to have equal opportunity in the digital economy, (x) consumer rights in e-commerce, (xi) the right to hold intellectual property on the Internet, (xii) the right to universal access to the Internet, (xiii) the right to digital literacy, (xiv) the right to impartiality on the Internet, and (xv) the right to a secure Internet.

In order to provide evidence of such examples of digital rights in cities and regions in the times of COVID-19, the Coalition of Cities for Digital Rights (CCDR), encompassing more than 50 global cities (www.citiesfordigitalrights.org), is worth mentioning as the key advocacy group at the global level pushing an ambitious and highly relevant policy agenda on digital rights (Calzada & Almirall, 2020; Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, 2019). Barcelona and Glasgow are part of this Coalition of Cities for Digital Rights.

In the following summary, this chapter has gathered ongoing policy actions about digital rights taking place in these two stateless algorithmic nations by analysing their core and flagship cities. This analysis has been conducted through a direct survey of city representatives carried out in November 2020 among different CCDR (Cities Coalition for Digital Rights) global cities, such as Barcelona and Glasgow:¹

- (i) Barcelona in Catalonia: Barcelona has been focusing on digital inclusion as the main priority to implement digital rights. In addition to this, open technologies and accountable decision-making in AI are presented as second and third priorities. The city of Barcelona is putting value on projects that are already occurring in civil society and at universities. A specific contextual aspect that has leveraged the relevance of digital rights in Barcelona has been the strong civil society alongside the fact that the Mobile World Congress has allowed Barcelona to lead the paradigm of "technological humanism". In this direction, universal

¹The author of this article acknowledges the collaboration implemented with the Core Team of the CCDR.

and equal access to the Internet and digital literacy are seen as the main priority alongside transparency; accountability; non-discrimination of data, content, and algorithms; and participatory democracy, diversity, and inclusion. In Barcelona, the most critical stakeholder group to achieve more protection for digital rights is the private companies, especially those providing public services. However, according to the city representatives, without the engagement of civil society, it is rather difficult to achieve an inclusive data-governance model. Moreover, according to them, certain entrepreneurs, activists, and innovators are pushing ahead Barcelona's ecosystem of data. In addition, they acknowledge that COVID-19 and its effects have already modified their initial priorities on digital rights by altering their strategic plan towards digital inclusion. For Barcelona, a good data commons strategy could be defined as one based on transparency, accountability, pedagogy, and the data sovereignty of citizens. In Barcelona, there are initiatives related to platform and data cooperatives sharing health data to tackle COVID-19. Finally, citizens have so far reacted positively to the City Hall's adoption of AI that particularly focuses on social services, transport, and mobility. The way in which the claim for digital rights could be scaled up towards further data sovereignty at the regional level remains to be seen.

- (ii) **Glasgow in Scotland:** Glasgow has been focusing on digital inclusion and essential digital skills. However, Glasgow is not actively working on raising citizens' awareness of the need to protect their digital rights yet. As such, Glasgow has been focusing on establishing their own actions for digital rights and engaging with elected officials to raise their awareness. Having said that, Glasgow is keen to learn from the CCDR to raise awareness with citizens. Given that tackling social inequalities is the most pressing need for the city of Glasgow, local authorities have been actively implementing measures to achieve universal and equal access to the Internet and digital literacy. According to the city representative, the most critical stakeholder in the city to achieve more protection for digital rights is the leader of the council (equivalent of mayor), who positioned digital rights as a human right. Consequently, the public sector is leading the data-governance model of the city. Regarding COVID-19 and its effects on the priority of digital rights, city representatives acknowledge that they have witnessed much greater data sharing within the city and with national public bodies, which in itself may reinforce the idea that sooner than later data sovereignty will be claimed at the national level in Scotland. For the city of Glasgow, a good data commons strategy could be defined as one that provides value to all stakeholders in the city. Yet, citizen-driven data initiatives and projects lack consistency and leadership. In Glasgow, platform and data cooperatives could assist the city in tackling COVID-19-driven economic and social vulnerabilities among pandemic citizens. Regarding existing data cooperative initiatives in the city, interestingly, there are more general data-sharing agreements being established between public bodies that could provide the basis for data cooperatives. In response to the main challenges and obstacles for the public sector to implement AI, the Glasgow city

representative considers public trust as the main hindrance. However, positively, AI adoption is consequently being coordinated by the Scottish Government through their AI strategy, where Glasgow has an active role and a say in the data sovereignty-driven strategy on AI, which essentially shows what this article is attempting to depict: an interdependent joint effort between Glasgow's claim on digital rights and a strategy on data sovereignty by the stateless algorithmic nation of Scotland. Regarding how citizens would react to the adoption of AI for implementations in the public sector, the Glasgow city representative acknowledged that we do not know yet how citizens do or will respond to this adoption. In response to areas in which AI could contribute to delivering efficient and inclusive public services, Glasgow seems to focus on supporting their sustainability agenda.

In a broader context, as these cities and regions around the world try to cope effectively with the COVID-19 crisis, we are witnessing a wide variety of digital technology responses. Mobile phones, social media, and AI can play a substantial role in dealing with the spread of COVID-19. This includes the development of contact-tracing apps and the use of big data to analyse people's movements. For example, mobility data from Deutsche Telecom is being used to estimate the degree to which the German population is complying with requests to stay at home. In Singapore, the TraceTogether app uses Bluetooth to enable the health ministry to identify people who have been in close contact with infected individuals. Many of these kinds of solutions can be positive and help policymakers respond quickly and appropriately. They make it possible to monitor, anticipate the spread of the disease, and support mitigation. While the use of these applications might be effective in the short term, there may be a fine line between hurried implementation of new technologies in times of crisis and negative long-term impact on digital rights (Goggin et al., 2019). How do we adequately balance the values of privacy and autonomy with values of safety and security for citizens? A special focus on pragmatic examples with a privacy-first and inclusive tech approach could be utilised as follows, considering social innovation over technological innovation (Calzada, 2020a).

Privacy is one of our human rights, inalienable and non-negotiable in a democracy, and any decisions citizens make now will resonate for far longer than the COVID-19 virus will (Wong, 2020). Though the situation citizens are in provides a unique context, laws are not as context-specific as we would like in this situation. This presents us with the risk that regulations we pass now may later on be used for purposes more nefarious than battling a global pandemic. It is therefore especially prudent to create an open space where the debate about how to combine personal privacy and public health can exist. The right to a private life must be upheld. This means that any use of personal health data, geolocation data, or other personal forms of data must be limited, supervised, and temporary. Under these conditions, emergency measures can be created. How do cities and regions ensure a democratic, social, and humane use of technology in their communities? And more specifically, how can cities and regions use technology as an enabler to face the current

COVID-19 pandemic with citizens' digital rights at the centre of their design and application?

2.4 *Postpandemic Grassroots Innovation: Data Cooperatives*

We have heard many times that data was the oil of the twenty-first century. But what nobody told us so far was the data sharing should be based on trust, social capital that emerged in communities from peer-to-peer interactions. This contrasts with the widespread neoliberal assumption that data should inevitably be monetised as one-size-fits-all solution. This factor related to postpandemic grassroots innovation humbly suggests another alternative pathway in light of several emerging and further promising practical cases to revert surveillance capitalism.

Big data—extremely large data sets that may be analysed computationally—originated with the increasingly advanced data collection capabilities of the Internet, social networks, the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and sensors. But this AI-driven algorithmic phenomenon has led to new consequences—such as hyper-targeting through data analytics, facial recognition, and individual profiling—received by many with both helplessness and threat, and resulting in a not-so-desirable outcomes, such as massive manipulation and control via surveillance capitalism push in the USA and the Social Credit Systems in China. In contrast, these societal concerns raised a debate in Europe that crystallised into the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) coming into force since May 2018, becoming thereafter a fully fledged inspiration for several data regulations worldwide, including the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA). Yet, it seems the discussion around data governance has spurred fruitful debates, we must confess more nuanced and more humble cases grounded in practice are required to pave the way ahead. At present, most alternative initiatives stemming from platform cooperatives are based on services provided by Amazon Web Services (AWS), which shows in itself the insurmountable hindrances related to how hard.

Moreover, we are now witnessing the side effects of an uneven global vaccination and its aftermath. First, the paradox of vaccine passports supposedly being a tool meant to unite the world after lockdown could now instead end up balkanizing it into closed systems where only certain apps are accepted, only certain vaccine brands are welcome, and only some documentation is accessible to cross any border and get into a country. Second, the global race for doses has also affected which countries get which vaccines resulting in an extreme protectionism also known as vaccine nationalism. And third, it goes without saying that despite the fact that biometric technologies from facial recognition to digital fingerprinting have proliferated through society in recent years, the benefits they offer are clearly counterbalanced by numerous democratic, ethical, and societal concerns.

The amount of data and resulting power held by a small number of players, the so-called GAFAM (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft), has already created a counterreaction in the European continent. The European Strategy for

Data and the Data Governance Act attempt to provide an alternative driven by the so-called data sovereignty (whatever it might mean not only in Europe but also elsewhere worldwide). Recent years have seen an emergence of this notion to claim data ownership in debates on the development, implementation, and adjustment of new data-driven technologies and their infrastructures. Despite its unclear territorial and technopolitical jurisdiction, data sovereignty is exemplified through national data sovereignty in cloud computing, indigenous data sovereignty, and (more intensively now) patient data sovereignty claims. At the end of the day, the concentration of power around data has been counterreacted from claims stemming from national and political interests, indigenous population's digital rights, and users-consumers-workers-citizens' digital rights.

In the European continent, data sovereignty has adopted a legal form of data altruism and donation, which means that individuals can choose the way their data can be stored. Although it remains to be seen how this data sovereignty enables citizen organisations to help us move from the current paradigm of individuals giving up data to large big tech to a system based on collective data rights and accountability, with legal standards and fiduciary representation. As such, we could argue that these cooperative forms known as data cooperatives are a subcategory of the widespread phenomenon called platform cooperatives (Calzada, 2020c).

As such, arguably, the current pandemic and democracy are pervasively related to data governance issues, exposing citizens' vulnerability in a potential surveillance state. But, how can job quality (or worker power) be ensured for all platform workers while also creating further democratic socio-economic platformised alternatives to revert algorithmic and data-opolitics (data oligopolies) extractivist business-as-usual hegemonic paradigm? At this stage, consequently, we may also ask whether it is possible to alter existing data governance extractivist models to incentivize the emergence of platform cooperatives and data cooperatives to protect pandemic citizens' labour and digital rights (Calzada, 2020c).

Data cooperatives are member-owned data management storages (e.g. credit unions) with fiduciary obligations to member, where all data usage is for the benefit of members and done only with their consent; it is driven by privacy preservation. Data cooperatives focus on data interactions among citizens and not essentially in the core social value behind them. There are several examples such as Salus, Driver's Seat, and MyData so far implemented (Scholz & Calzada, 2021).

According to Pentland and Hardjono, with 100 million people members of credit unions, the opportunity for community organisations to leverage community-owned data is massive. Nonetheless, data ownership or data sovereignty has been used so far for advocacy, and it seems now more a claim than something that can be achieved in practice very easily. Data flows in fact are complicated and not easy to be tracked as we are witnessing in the aftermath of COVID-19. Furthermore, the legal rights associated with data flows depict a complex set of boundaries when it comes to the ownership of data. While there exists a remarkable degree of harmonisation and coherence around the data protection core principles in key international and regional agreements and guidelines, there are diverging implementation practices around data flows. Besides this, Pentland and Hardjono advocate how financialising

personal data, data cooperatives might emerge at the community level. Actually, this is rather unlikely without any means for controlling data flows and ensuring data sovereignty for members of specific local communities.

Hence, data cooperatives being a voluntary collaborative pooling by individuals of the personal data for the benefit of the membership of the group or community present several shortcomings as well. Some advocates may only see the data pooling process as a purely technical process, whereas it is clearly a socio-communitarian process based on trust and related to social capital. As Loukissas argued, all data ultimately are local; thus, it cannot take from granted the territorial and local dimension of this discussion. It is key that the ability to balance the world's data economy inevitably depends on the fair interplay among stakeholders. Consequently, it is very clear that citizens and workers by themselves have no direct representation, yet consumers who were able to control their data would be a force to be acknowledged as long as their data would be localised/territorialised in certain data ecosystems.

Communities using their own data requires decentralised and federated data ecosystems arranged by sectors (health-related data, environmental data, transport and mobility data, energy and consumption data, etc.) being clearly located in certain places and allowing to interoperate among each other, unless members of the community decide not to do it. This would mean owning data and being sovereign about their own data the produce. We are suggesting that data should be co-operativised among members (citizens or workers) of communities. For co-operativising data, we consider that localising data require at the same time translocal federated data ecosystems (via blockchain) to scale up the potential of the cooperative action and outreach (Calzada & Almirall, 2020). Citizens in communities will be thus using their own data gathered in local repositories own by them while contributing to the data sharing if they would allow doing it (Calzada, 2021). Actually, this is the case of Eva.coop, a Montreal-based data cooperative: They provide an infrastructure for groups but without accessing local data about passengers. Some data are shared, however. Eva.coop is built on the EOSIO blockchain protocol as a way to show how the cooperative model could mark a new blockchain-based iteration of the sharing economy driven by decentralised system that respects privacy and fits into local needs. Local data matters and Eva might have shed light on the way to follow. Local communities have more input, drivers are treated more fairly, and riding members maintain their privacy and are comforted by a locally supported app. Could this third generation of blockchain be a protocol from which to scale up a federated cooperative commonwealth based on structured data ecosystems by economic sectors (transport, healthcare, education, etc.)?

Probably, there are few policy aspects worth considering for scaling up data cooperatives: (i) First, there is a clear need to reactive civil societies for experimentation paying special attention to city-regional unique features as clear sources of community-driven sovereign data to foster the creation of locally-based data cooperatives. (ii) Second, it is probably very necessary still to provide enhanced training about the scope and functioning of cooperatives to enable the fertilisation of data cooperatives. (iii) Third, procurement and public incentives are required to push ahead, enhance, and reinforce platform and data cooperatives beyond marginal

experiments aligned with data donation and altruism. (iv) And finally, initiatives around data cooperatives need to find their own strategic pathways amidst the digital and social economy policy agenda in each regional context worldwide.

3 Conclusion

COVID-19 has been a trigger for increasing the impact of digital transformations on the daily lives of citizens and democracy. However, little is known or has been explored in relation to the direct effects of *big tech* surveillance capitalism and the cybercontrol push by nation-state governments during this crisis on citizens from stateless algorithmic nations. Paralleling this context, since the implementation of the GDPR in May 2018, the European Commission has been intensively promoting the idea of technological sovereignty without further specifics, but the emerging project in this field is Gaia-X (GaiaX, 2020), which in itself has been promoted by France and Germany, surfacing new democratic concerns about the role of citizens in this timely debate. The aim of Gaia-X is apparently to direct European companies towards domestic cloud providers. Paradoxically, China's Cybersecurity Law mandates that certain data be stored on local servers or undergo a security assessment before it is exported. China's data rules can be enforced anywhere in the world if the data at issue describes and affects Chinese citizens. This law will also create a blacklist prohibiting foreign entities from receiving personal data from China. It goes without saying that in this geopolitical competition, the USA is beginning to advance its own version of technological sovereignty by prohibiting Chinese cloud companies from storing and processing data on US citizens and businesses. Advocates of this approach argue that some degree of data sovereignty is inevitable. The global Internet still functions in the face of these rules, and companies continue to profit and innovate. Others argue that what is needed is for different nation-states to collaborate on common standards, agreeing to a set of core principles for the cloud and norms for government access to data stored there. Nonetheless, this chapter questions the remaining scope for subnational entities and, among them, for stateless algorithmic nations that present a strong will to bring their control of their citizens back through data devolution. This chapter claims that this debate has been absent for deepening democracy so far and requires further active positions to be taken by stakeholders in these territorial contexts by implementing the democratic toolkit consisting of four factors: algorithmic nations, data sovereignty, digital rights, and data cooperatives (Calzada, 2020g, h, i).

Alongside the debate on algorithmic nations, data sovereignty, digital rights, and data cooperatives, millions of companies now use cloud computing to store data and run applications and services remotely. Furthermore, the pandemic has exacerbated the way citizens telework by introducing a 24/7 remote pattern. The technological sovereignty term emerged to describe the many ways governments try to assert more control over the computing environments on which their nation-states rely. Thus, governments around the world are passing measures that require companies

to host data infrastructure and store certain kinds of data from citizens in local jurisdictions. Some also require companies that operate within their borders to provide the government with access to data and code stored in the cloud. This trend, especially when applied unilaterally, might erode the fundamental model of cloud computing that feeds, most importantly, non-European *big tech* firms—often without the public scrutiny of nation-states’ governments—which relies on free movement of data across borders. A cloud user or provider should be able to deploy any application or data set to the cloud at any time or place. Thus, citizens should be able to select the data provider that can best meet their needs. To that end, the European Commission has established what are called “data ecosystems” without giving any clue about how local and regional authorities can self-govern and control their data power by relocating and devolving data ownership to their fellow citizens. Thus, in summary, this chapter suggests that stateless algorithmic nations need to start strategising in several policy areas without further ado: (i) to set up data strategies to have a say among pan-European agencies; (ii) to take the lead from the public sector on AI-intensive governance schemes; (iii) to explore the added value and the opportunity that blockchain may offer to better connect local administrations; (iv) to engage in collective actions through networks of cities, e.g. CCDR; (v) to implement data and platform cooperatives in stateless algorithmic nations as a way to reactivate socio-economic activity postpandemic; (vi) to further identify vulnerable groups in hyperconnected societies to avoid leaving them behind; and (vii) to put the digital rights of citizens at the forefront by prioritising actions in favour of protecting privacy and ensuring ownership.

Above all, how do we foresee stateless algorithmic nations operating through technological sovereignty in the postpandemic and post-Brexit scenario? Data sovereignty is a political outlook in which information and communications infrastructure and technology are aligned to the laws, needs, and interests of the city, region, or country in which users are located. Thus, data location and data devolution unequivocally matter as we have witnessed during the COVID-19 crisis. In postpandemic societies, the major challenge for the EU and the United Kingdom is to establish their cyber-sovereignty policy to be aligned with data ecosystems on the city-regional scale. In this endeavour, the emerging generation of digital cooperatives—so-called data and platform cooperatives—can clearly contribute (Calzada, 2020c). The EU and the United Kingdom are at the moment living labs for creating data and platform cooperatives stemming from data altruism and data donation. How can citizens be governed and organise themselves in stateless algorithmic nations to establish new social capital that could overcome the postpandemic social distancing measures and consequently the loss of social capital? These challenges ultimately boil down to protecting citizens’ digital rights while relying on the capacity of cities and regions to deal with self-governing and interdependent data policies as the only possible way to ensure fairer European and British democracies.

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The City, Urbanization and Inequality



Jordi Borja

Abstract Taking the city and the urban environment as a starting point, this analysis looks at globalization and the inability that states have so far demonstrated to find solutions to the political, socioeconomic and ecological problems of our time. The public policy of the “30 glorious years” (1945–1975) in Spain and later neoliberal privatizations paved the way for productive accumulation to be replaced by financial accumulation, which, to a large extent, is speculative. Working- and middle-class majorities are disintegrating; broad sectors of society have become atomized and are being subject to increasingly precarious conditions. Inequalities are accentuated, and social class is becoming more diffuse. Is now the time to revive the centralized statism of the post-WWII period? It seems not. From an eminently geographical perspective, this text proposes a reappropriation of the public space of cities to pave the way to a new way of urban life. Local and regional settings offer opportunities to explore alternative forms of production and democracy.

Keywords Urban space · Public space · Urban transformations · New centralities

1 Globalization, States and Cities

The centralist state neither confronts globalization nor reinforces the local authorities that constitute its own connection with citizens. We stand by Dahrendorf’s et al. (1992) assertion that the rigidity of democratic states is responsible for their inability to adapt. This rigidity in turn provokes indifference in subject citizens. Citizens are estranged from the “state”, but at least, some sort of relationship is maintained not only through elections, taxes and repressive laws but also through social policies. In recent decades, however, the “sovereign” state has been weakened significantly. Some portion of this weakening has been due to the development of supranational organizations, including the European Union, but economic globalization has played an even greater role. Global economic-financial-commercial

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power is imposed on nation-states. International treaties and laws, tending fundamentally in favour of the so-called free market, benefit globalized economic powers. States, subordinate to or accomplices of these economic powers, have become more repressive of their citizens and are liquidating the welfare state (Borja, 2009). Social majorities protest and give the appearance of rebelling, but this rebellion constitutes a complaint more than an effective transformative process. In this context, it seems that local powers can acquire much more transformative capacity, provided that territorial institutions are rooted in mobilized citizen societies.

From this contemporary context, we must address a panorama that can be read schematically in terms of the following elements:

- (a) *The evolution of globalization: from the financial and commercial economy to social reproduction.* The biggest economic actors and their financial structures exercise very real power when engaging with governments that are inactive or that even collaborate in support of the interests of those actors. The population is seen simply as “labour”, skilled or otherwise, sedentary, or nomadic, dispersed or marginalized. Unions have been weakened; wage earners constitute the vast majority, but they have renounced the exercise a good part of their rights. Some citizens have restarted social mobilization oriented towards an alternative politics, an “alternative globalization”, towards different models of work and of relationships with the environment, rights and recognition.
- (b) *States between two worlds.* The state, taken as a static, rigid and anachronistic political-legal framework, is cumbersome and hardly effective or realistic. Nowadays, governments and parliaments, armed forces, judiciaries, centralized top-level administrations and churches (very close to the state) are more inoperative than ever in history. Caught between economic-financial globalization and city-regions, the state needs to transform itself to find a new identity beyond the historical-cultural, perhaps as an articulating element between complementary territories, connected through a political-legal system that could be more contractual than hierarchical.
- (c) *From states to cities.* Cities’ strength lies in three areas. The first of these is their dense and diverse demographic concentration. City-regions, metropolitan cities and network cities are the basis of innovation. Heterogeneity is a key to creativity. When asked what it would take to boost economic activity, an executive director from the City of London replied, “Something we already have: pubs. *This is where people meet. People who, had pubs not existed, would never have met*”. A second source of strength arises from local governments and an active and well-organized citizenry. Both of these are political powers and can confront the forces of economic-financial globalization. The combination of territorial powers and social/citizen mobilizations generates real power, which can be transferred from states to a local or regional scale, with legislative and executive powers, personnel (public sector) and financial and technological resources. Lastly, a third expression of the strength of cities can be identified in their power with respect to globalized forces, be these financial, commercial or technological, such as big data collectors. Although it was thought that, in theory, state

unions (such as the EU) would strengthen states against globalized companies, the truth is that the result was the opposite. Local powers and citizen movements can, however, find ways to reduce the privileges of the large multinationals. The current “global” situation offers them opportunities to do so.

2 Cities and Territories, Their Development Up to the Present

Cities have become increasingly important not only in politics but also in economic, social, cultural and media terms. There is no doubt that they are already complex and multidimensional social actors (Borja & Castells, 1997). However, globalization tends to kill the city understood as a collective expression of society. Today’s cities are threatened by a triple negative process: dissolution, fragmentation and privatization. These processes are also mutually reinforcing and accentuate marginality and inequality.

There is a collective response that occurs regularly in the history of the city and urban planning. It occurs when, during the process of urban growth and evolution of an existing city, priority is given to construction, when spaces are specialized due to social segregation and functional zoning. The collective response that occurs in these cases is a social and cultural reaction to the return to public space. It often mixes *passeisme*¹ and modernity, the mythification of the past and a synthesized proposal for the future, local demands and universal values. Despite its limitations, it is a timely and necessary reaction to avoid the urban disaster that is confusing the city with simple urbanization.

Pausing briefly to recount the history of cities, we face the risk of criticism from historians who may object to the simplification of reducing urban history to three major stages or eras. Proceeding nevertheless, the first of these is the age of the concentrated city, separated from its surroundings. The second is that of the metropolitan city, city plus periphery. The third is that of the contemporary city, the city “yet to be rethought” in the context of globalization. That is, the city-region, the network city, the multipolar or polycentric network city, networked into macro-regional urban systems, continental axes and global flows. While simple, the above tripartite distinction is still useful to urban planners, as it allows them to see new dynamics neither as a fatal curse nor as the objective expression of modernity, but as challenges that must be responded to. We must discover possible elements of continuity with respect to the past and distinguish what is necessary from what is excessive or avoidable in new processes. This is a necessary condition if one aims to be able to face the present challenges together with proposing new models and projects that formulate integrated responses.

¹French expression: recovery of forms of architecture from times past.

As cities developed in the twentieth century, the very low-income and informal working classes lived on the fringes of the recognized city but almost always maintained a certain cohesion with it. This cohesion was manifested through physical continuities, access to some central nuclei directly or accessible mobility. These nuclei were less powerful and had a less developed historical character than both historical and modern centralities, but they did make a certain cohesion possible. As we will see later, distances from the centre started to significantly increase in the last third of the twentieth century. An urban diffusion that overflows the city is taking place even while politicians and experts are still busy debating the metropolitan city. In this way, new areas emerge which, while composed of urbanizing elements, are no longer really a city. This urbanization eats up the city and leaves behind an urban phenomenon characterized by the very inequality which we have spoken about above, and populations with deficient citizenship or deprived of citizenship altogether. This situation brings to mind reconceptions of the death of the city and the ways in which citizens confront this tendency.

Throughout the twentieth century, a diverse combination of various factors (including the dynamics of private property, public and private prioritization of real estate programs, exclusive access by cars to “circulatory” space, limited commercial activity and citizen insecurity) led to a crisis of urban public space. Consequently, a tendency to turn public space into a specialized element, one more piece of the “infrastructure” of the city, in order to “save” or recover it, was reinforced. This is how segregated and monovalent spaces began to spread and multiply: one space for children, another for dogs, another for parking, another “for monuments”, and so on. Through this process, public space and the city lost two foundational functions from which all their potential is derived:

1. To give shape and meaning to totality, to ensure pathways and elements of continuity and to highlight the differences between buildings, city blocks and urban areas.
2. To order relationships between buildings, infrastructure, monuments, open lots, roads, transition spaces and open spaces in each area of the city, that is, functions that are located on two different scales that have been lost over the course of urbanization.

In the nineteenth century, urban planning formalized the legal distinction between private space and public space. It regulated public and private use of buildings, in order to guarantee the availability of public spaces and the diversity of functions and collective uses that could be made of these. The need to intervene in the industrial city gave rise to active urban policies oriented towards making public spaces that could be identified with an urban fabric that would shape the city. This idea is visible in the work of two urban planning figures from the second half of the nineteenth century: Haussmann and Cerdà. The former restructured old Paris and the latter designed the modern Barcelona expansion of the *Ensanche*. They responded to the above needs by ordering the city around public spaces. This was a principal element in both Haussmann’s system of avenues, squares and monuments and Cerdà’s gridded street layout.

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, urban expansion permitted movement between home, work and consumption and access to central areas. Throughout that same century, supra-municipal cities were created, thanks to immigration and the media. These allowed people to be part of the life of the city without actually residing in it. The geographical expansion of cities generated municipalities with their own citizen structures, which encouraged the appearance of urban clusters without the qualities of a city.

The dominant trend in the current moment is to form enclaves within cities, multiplying segregations and social exclusion. There is a trend towards the fragmentation of urban-regional territory and to the privation of the city as a public space (Borja, 2004). In this city of sheltered minorities and tourist populations, low- and middle-class populations are dispersed throughout work areas and unused land and also further segregated by the dispersion of goods and services of social reproduction.

The revival of the culture of public space is, at present, a response not only to deficits in space and infrastructure for collective use but also due to a “specialized” conception of public space. This conception has been reinforced in recent years by an “urban planning of products”. This diminishes the concept of the urban project, which should be more than just a built commodity and instead address the environment and conditions of construction. Urban architecture can be very interesting, but it is not the same thing as urban planning and policy. Product urbanism, linked to competitiveness strategies and a certain submission to the private sector, often contributes to urban fragmentation and segregation. If guided by public authorities, however, it could become an agent for the construction of a city logic that, starting out from the current fragmentation, could redress this situation instead of worsening it, as generally happens.

This trend towards urban planning of products is justified not only by private businesses. It is also seen as a way to reduce risk, both investment risk and the risk of meeting the other, the risk of difference and heterogeneity. Safety becomes both the only desired horizon and also synonymous with homogeneity, transforming the city into a model, a non-place.

From the fashion of a weak and poor urban culture in turn of the century cities, a continuous search for mass entertainment can be identified. This entertainment tries to be risk-free and minimize contact between rich and poor, black and white, while simultaneously maximizing the financial benefits of its promoters. It includes the most recent investments in the construction of buildings for suburban shopping centres and theme parks, downtown festival markets and thematic spaces. As argued by Herbert Muschamp (1995), this category of urban businesses seeks to reinscribe the security of the values of the middle classes in the urban centre. A certain hybrid, an urban-suburban ethic that fuses suburban safety and standardization with urban congestion, offers the middle classes pleasant public spaces where they can enjoy themselves without fear. However, this kind of urban business forces the city to become an invisible fortress where the rich and poor remain polarized, but this separation is less obvious.

There is another concept of the city that accepts and approves of metropolitan chaos and of the city of non-places. Thus the “generic” city conceptualized by

Koolhaas manufactures scattered pieces throughout the territory, exalts anomie and takes for granted that the best possible order will emerge from chaos. This is functional urban thinking for private businesses, politicians in a hurry and gestural architects. The generic city is a city freed from the slavery of the centre, from the straitjacket of identity. It is an expression of today's logic and arises from reflections on today's needs. It is a city without history. The serenity of the generic city is achieved through emptying the public sphere.

Urban areas without a physical, institutional and cultural city are not cities. Furthermore, these areas give rise to speculation, corruption, exclusions and spatial injustice. There are cities with their centralities and heterogeneities, and built-up areas without a city are atomized settlements, without citizenship, whose greatest attraction is anomie. The consequences are environmental unsustainability, a decrease in average productivity, weak sociocultural integration and crises of governance (Borja, 2004).

An example of this is the *ronc-points*, or interstitial or laconic territories (a concept used by Ingersoll, 1996) which, as atomized territories, have populations that do not regularly connect with urban centres. These are populations without citizenship, which maintain few relationships with institutions (except for education, health or specific bureaucratic processes), who, on many occasions, feel unrecognized. Consequently, while the peripheries look to the city and it is possible to speak of a relative social cohesion between the two, these *ronc-point* territories experience isolation.

This is to say, there are problems of a lack of meaning in the city which are present in middle and upper class peripheral residential areas. These same problems are also evident in middle-lower class areas that house the excluded. This gentrifying process is exacerbated as a consequence of tourism, leisure, sociocultural facilities and shopping centres, office towers and prestigious buildings, etc. This causes a heterogeneous, diverse, vital city to change with these processes, to become "a city for sale".

The city as a place that produces citizenship, a sphere where this citizenship is exercised, is not the generic city. Generic cities have a tendency towards anomie, are privatized by fear and lack of solidarity and are socially oriented by individualistic and "familiarist" values (Sennett, 1975) (that is, to seek only the company and the closeness of the "identical"). Generic cities are simultaneously fragmented by local physical and administrative structures and by the corporate localisms of ghettos of all kinds, without common physical and symbolic references or shared meanings for all inhabitants.

No matter how much one tries to justify the generic city—the chaos city, the emerging city in the peripheries or the telepolis—on the basis of the great heterogeneity of post-industrial society, the dynamics of the market or the determining impact of new communication technologies, the fact is that these explanatory factors can be useful or adjustable for very different purposes. They can act in very opposite directions according to the values and objectives behind public policies.

In this sense, the difficulties in creating a city of public space with an egalitarian and open drive, referential elements that produce meaning, a diversity of centralities

and the ability to articulate different pieces and functions are beyond evident. In public spaces, a balance of functions between the public and the private must be produced. Public policy should determine density, uses and urban design. The private sector can develop, build and contribute land. In this conception, streets matter more than houses.

3 Spatial Inequalities

The tendency over this last period of change is different. In cities, we can see that the globalized financial economy, speculation in land and speculative construction, all of which generate spatial capital, have expanded (see B. Secchi, 1993). In turn, speculation has generated corruption and waste and has caused some sectors of the population to be exiled to the outskirts, in such a way that compact and central cities are “homogenized” for the more affluent classes.

The contradiction is that the most in need, low-income sectors of the population, other marginal subjects and immigrants, as well as some middle-class sectors outside the sphere of citizenship, are the ones who most suffer from difficulties in accessing these institutions. They therefore suffer most from spatial inequality and its consequences. Some experience increasing inequalities and others increasing levels of fear.

The environment, landscape, relationship with nature, aesthetics of buildings, public space, easy access to centralities, mobility, perception of others and recognition and lack thereof of inhabitants are all factors that contribute to this inequality. The city must offer services and quality of life throughout the entire area it encompasses, both in terms of basic services (water, energy, waste disposal, safety, mobility, environment, etc.) and other benefits (health, education, access to culture, social protection for people economically or culturally marginalized, etc). We cannot, of course, forget housing. This housing must be dignified, high-quality, functional and locally adapted. It must also reflect its social environment and respect the right of inhabitants to settle and develop their lives there.

These inhabitants of the periphery of the city should have the same recognized rights as those who reside in central urban areas. This demands that, as with all other citizens, they enjoy easy access to the agencies and offices of public institutions.

4 Social Reproduction, Spatial Inequalities and Costs to Citizens

To demonstrate the concept of spatial injustice, let us now analyse some of the costs generated by the exclusion of sectors of the population, be it in marginal neighbourhoods and marginal peripheries, or in interstitial areas, also known as “no man’s lands”.

1. Socio-economic costs. Although housing is often cheaper than in the urban centre, life on the periphery involves other expenses. The cost of transport, including the time spent in transit and the complexity of many commutes, is such that some workers choose to sleep on the street during the week instead of returning to their homes in the periphery. Cars are expensive and problematic transport alternatives and are affected by changes in the price of fuel and increases in fees and taxes. Searching for jobs in marginal areas is more difficult as far fewer contacts and little information are generally available. Similarly, accessing services is more difficult because of the costs in terms of time and money and because of the relative scarcity of information about the options available.
2. Political and administrative costs. The fringes of the city are home to many low-income, culturally marginalized and atomized groups and individuals with little access to the city centre. These people live in the margins and are not fully aware of what the state gives, takes and demands, and cannot avail of the rights afforded by public administrations. Accessing institutions for various activities at all levels of government, for example, obtaining documents, rights, or information or participating in political organizations, becomes an odyssey.
3. Cultural costs. Relative isolation, dependence on limited means of communication (mainly TV and radio), limited availability of more or less innovative cultural activities, etc.

5 Diffuse Society and Fragmented Territories. The Crisis of Citizenship and Social Reproduction

The mass movements of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries made specific demands addressing the availability of rental housing, local health centres, affordable public transport, unhealthy environmental conditions, the risk of flooding, etc. However, in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, labour was the priority issue: wages, unemployment, pensions, etc. The social power of these popular movements lay in the unions. The state rolled out large infrastructure projects that generated jobs, and laws were created codifying the right to strike and granting social protection (the United Kingdom, the United States, Nordic countries, etc.).

Social reproduction in the industrial society of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was not understood as a set of interdependent needs and demands. Political and social institutions and the industrial and financial bourgeoisie played a role in making sure that, to some extent, some basic services were gradually “universalized”. While including transport and related infrastructure, this did not reach the entire population. Other priority goods and services were supported by the public and private sectors only on the basis of “charity”. These were accessed by only a part of the masses, and this access was precarious and very limited. It included

“social” housing, hospitals for the poor, education that was minimal or absent until the middle of the twentieth century, “poorhouses” and so on.

The welfare state, which incorporated rights and public policies, is more properly of the twentieth century and took form specifically in the wake of the Second World War. There was a tradition in England based on the precedents of the thirteenth century *Charter of the Forest*, the Poor Laws, the “levellers”, the struggle to improve the squalid working-class neighbourhoods that Engels described, and the development of trade unions that demanded housing and social protection throughout the nineteenth century. In Nordic countries, Bismarck’s Germany (in exchange for political authoritarianism), the United States of the New Deal and France of the Popular Front of 1936, etc., there were segmented social policies: care for the elderly, vacations, the right to strike, relative social security for formal workers, etc. The most global or inclusive idea was that of the “welfare state” designed by Lord Beveridge in 1942. Moves in this direction that had already occurred in the 1930s were more widely applied from 1945, supported by the Labour Party and especially Bevan. Welfare was institutionalized in the form of inclusive laws and policies over the course of the “30 glorious years” (1945–1975) in Western Europe. Operating within a different political framework, the Soviet bloc created its own version of the “welfare state” that guaranteed jobs, housing, basic services (water, energy, transport, etc.), education, health care and supported retirement. This was mostly universally accessible, although uniformity and quantity prevailed over quality.

6 Citizen Rights and Social Reproduction

The industrial city received criticism not only from the popular classes already mentioned. Middle- and upper sectors defended the coexistence of modern buildings with other older ones and demanded the opening up of attractive public spaces. Prominent intellectuals and professionals proposed and, in some cases, carried out plans and projects that made the city a source of goods and services for all its inhabitants. One very prominent figure was Cerdà, whose work in Barcelona reflected his concept of the Homogeneous City, providing housing, services and a road system accessible to all. Finally, Arturo Soria designed the Linear City, partially realized in Madrid and later in Stalingrad, now Volgograd.

The Cerdà and Soria projects were attempts to design “egalitarian cities”. Speculation and class distinction perverted, although they did not entirely unmake, these experiments. In New York, Moses, who promoted the great avenues and highways, structured the city around mobility and the great buildings that ended up defining the urban landscape. Some large Latin American cities, such as Mexico City and Buenos Aires, became dual cities with large avenues and tall buildings, contrasting with large rough areas for the lower-middle, lower-class and marginal sectors.

Despite this, in their subsequent development, public policies have not been able or have not sought to integrate the set of citizen goods and services that guarantee

social reproduction, which is at least as if not more important than social production. It is instead citizen movements that have promoted “the right to the city”.

6.1 City, Territory and Social Reproduction

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the “capitalist city” expressed the duality of capital and labour, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The inequality between the two blocks made itself apparent in cities, in neighbourhoods, and even between streets and buildings in close geographical proximity. However, in compact cities, a significant proportion of the popular sectors mixed with middle-class sectors in public space, integrating themselves into the political and social life of their cities. By contrast, Jorge Enrique Hardoy says, “The Latin American city is illegal”. Speaking from a Latin American context, he means that popular sectors do not enjoy citizenship status and yet they survive despite the fact that they do not receive, or receive only marginally, the goods and services that a city should provide. A significant proportion of these sectors live beyond the city, administratively and psychologically abandoned, transformed into invisible and maligned populations.

In the second half of the twentieth century, and especially from the end of the century, urbanization spread over vast territories both in Europe and in North and South America. This has meant that a significant proportion of both popular and middle-class sectors, as well as marginal and immigrant populations, now live beyond the cities and their peripheries. Living far away from everything, they are potential citizens in the non-city.

6.2 Capital Accumulation and Speculation

The speculative transactions of buying, holding and reselling primarily affect cities and territories that are partially urbanized and those that are acquired by banks and investment funds, sometimes from foreign countries. This implies that the construction of homes and offices very often evolves around the logic of speculation that seeks to generate money at an assessed cost. Consequently, cities are effectively exiling both popular sectors and a proportion of the middle class. This phenomenon even reaches into the peripheries well connected to the city centres, whose popular and lower-middle classes end up being forced into the “beyond” of the city. Thus cities lose their diversity, heterogeneity and interactions among citizens. The capitalist city is enriched, while society is impoverished.

7 The Renewal of Democracy in Urbanized Societies

7.1 The City, from the Level of the Citizen, as an Agent of Social Reproduction

As has been seen throughout this chapter, the city is where material, symbolic and cultural goods and services are all present and are interdependent on each other. For this reason, there should be nuclei in all areas or neighbourhoods, not only because of the facilities or shops but also because of the associated meeting points, identity elements and increased population diversity and social and political mobilization.

The industrial working class, traditionally considered the driver of protest movements, is today scattered, almost unrecognizable across the territory of relatively diverse neighbourhoods where employees, professionals, technicians, merchants, retirees, young people, immigrants, etc., are all part of the framework of social reproduction. The force of citizen revolutions rests on this framework and so emerges the perspective of the rights to the city. The vast urban majority, in compact cities, fragmented urbanizations or even territory excluded from the city itself, is a potential force for the conquest of citizen rights. The political awakening of these populations takes the form of claiming the right to the city as part of universal rights in the face of territorial inequality imposed by deficient citizenship.

7.2 So What Are the Challenges to Democratize Democracy from Cities?

The right to the city is a democratic reaction that integrates both the rights of citizens and urban criteria that make it possible to exercise these rights, especially in terms of the conception of public space.

The quality of public space is a fundamental test to evaluate citizen democracy. The advances and setbacks of democracy are expressed in public space, in all its political, social and cultural dimensions. Public space, understood as space for collective use, is the framework in which solidarity is woven, where conflicts are manifested and where demands and aspirations emerge and are held up against public policies and private initiatives. It is also in public space that the corrosive and excluding effects of current urban dynamics, through their presence or absence, become visible.

7.3 What Is Demanded and Denounced in Public Space?

Everything. The need for housing and opposition to evictions. Water (or the cost of water) and transportation. Accessibility and local nucleus. Cultural and sports facilities and schools. Cleanliness and safety. Transport and clean air. Open and green

spaces and clean and appealing neighbourhoods. If any of these elements or others not mentioned are missing, those that are present are compromised.

Furthermore, in public space, not only non-specifically urban (in the physical sense) rights are claimed, but also rights of another nature: social, economic, cultural and political. Employment, the denunciation of precariousness, basic income support and ongoing training; access to public education and healthcare, culture and communication (including online access); neighbourhood cultural and ethnic identity, diversity of sexual orientation and religion; and the political-legal equality of all residents in the city, that is, “citizenship by residence” (not only by nationality) all these claims, these rights, are directly linked.

If all are not enjoyed simultaneously, those rights that are accessible remain incomplete and limited, and they become denatured. The absence or limitation of some of these rights has a multiplier effect on urban inequalities. The right to the city is currently the operational concept to evaluate the degree of democracy. This right synthesizes, guides and establishes the horizon of democratizing social movements. However, to the extent that these movements need public space to express themselves, the quality of this space conditions the existence and potential of citizen demands.

7.4 The Right to the city Is Conditioned by the Physical and Political Forms Taken by Urban Development

Therefore, the materialization of this right will depend on how citizens confront the atomizing and exclusionary dynamics of current urban development processes. Conceptually, the right to the city must be linked to some of the main current social challenges:

- Precariousness at work, unemployment and the naturalization of the speculative economy.
- A shortage of accessible housing integrated into the urban fabric, evictions and ruinous indebtedness.
- The privatization of public spaces and public services.
- The waste of basic resources generated by current forms of urbanization and consumption.
- The forgetting and denial of the historical memory of popular demands and urban conquests.
- The politics of fear and the channelling of fear to fuel law-and-order campaigns against others, strangers and outsiders.
- Unequal access to information and communication, especially in the relationship between political institutions and citizens.

7.5 *Can the Right to the City be Achieved in the Current Political and Economic Frameworks?*

The revolution will be urban or it will not be at all, wrote Henri Lefebvre (1968). David Harvey (2013) wholeheartedly embraces this idea. However, revolutions occur very occasionally and are more often unsuccessful than victorious. Revolutions are not born through a social explosion, even in cases where there is a particular spark, but instead from an accumulation of inequalities, privileges and injustices. There are revolutions that can also be silent. Transformations to make social relations more egalitarian are won when political institutions open to popular classes and democratizing ideas become hegemonic in society as a whole. In the present historical moment, revolutions, noisy or otherwise, do not seem to be a democratizing process, but rather the opposite. We are living in a *de-democratizing* period that, at least in Europe and America, is readily identifiable.

7.6 *Is the Right to the City an Explanatory Concept for Urban Revolution?*

The theoretical basis of the “right to the city” is citizens’ demand for social reproduction within a framework of multidimensional democracy (spatial, political, social, cultural, economic, environmental). Democratizing urban processes seize rights linked to social reproduction, or “indirect wages” as a whole, and are linked with social production. Whether these processes culminate in ruptures or revolutions or advance progressively with steps both forwards and backwards will depend on the specific relationships between political and economic forces in more or less conflictive contexts. The point is not to wait for “the urban revolution”. Over recent decades up until today, the “urban revolution”, or more correctly “counterrevolution”, has been against the “right to the city”. *De-democratization* has taken place largely in cities and urbanized territories through spatial injustice inflicted on cities, which are subject to the laws, powers and financial resources of central states. Meanwhile, in the present, globalized financial capitalism is colonizing and disposing the urban social world. The potential strength of cities lies in two areas in tension with each other: they have a representative political institutional base and an active society that exerts pressure on political and economic forces. The way forward might be via a disruptive and noisy revolution or via a gradual and silent advance, so long as the synthesis is the theoretical banner of the “right to the city”.

7.7 *Making Cities, Making Citizens*

Without cities, there is no citizenship, or a “capitis diminutio” of rights, even if people live in urbanized territories. To act as citizens implies coexistence, diversity and recognition by others. Citizenship applies to the collective of fellow citizens, more than atomized inhabitants. There is a deficit of citizenship in compact cities since access to the goods and services of social reproduction is very unequal. Here, however, this deficit is at least visible. The slightly more integrated populations of these cities are more able to protest and to seize their rights. There is a basic relationship between city-citizenship-social reproduction and rights. However, the city continually tends to exclusions. Social reproduction continually regenerates old and new social, economic and spatial inequalities. New demands and emerging rights appear. Citizenship is reconquered every day, social reproduction continually expands, and rights must be continually exercised; if not, they become twisted. Building cities and strengthening the sense of citizenship is not the sole responsibility of public institutions and especially not of local governments.

Active citizens first make petitions and demands, carry out expressive actions and speak out, to public administrations and in the media. In a second phase, the objectives are specified, and citizens resist directly or encourage actions of resistance and insistence on demands. They seek out legal or programmatic means and demand their legitimate rights to feel represented in local and other levels of government. The scene is set for either dialogue, pacts and new regulations, or else rulers are denounced and delegitimized or overthrown. In a third phase, there is a feeling of injustice, of not being recognized or of outrage at abuses, privileges or corruption. The aspiration is to an egalitarian, just and caring society without rulers who are above citizens, nor de facto powers (economic, judicial, military, etc.) that are not controlled by citizens and social organizations.

7.8 *The Democratization of Democracy and Political-Legal Frameworks*

A powerful and unifying social mobilization makes it possible to propose or even to force a change of guard in political and judicial institutions with the aim of legalizing what is present, a legitimizing force. Institutions and their leaderships are conservative and, in many cases, regressive. Constitutions and general legal principles in many cases favour democratizing processes, but they are almost always very generic and contradict each other. One example is the distinction between real rights and programmatic rights. Economic forces and media and state apparatuses pressure political leaders who, in many cases, are their accomplices. In this way, citizens’ rights are perverted, limited or omitted, even where there are democratic instruments (consultations, accountability and civic initiatives, citizen control of public or para-public entities, etc.) which should sustain them. On few occasions do

citizen-driven movements produce a recognition of rights not provided for in the constitutional framework or present only in a non-operative way, such as the reception of immigrants, women's equality, protection of the environment, the real right to decent housing for all, universal basic income, the rights of nationalities, etc. Despite this, democracy is not static; it is dynamic. It is not only institutional but also social and cultural since it is from these spheres that social and cultural processes that demand political and economic changes are generated. Remember that the law liberates but, if ossified, it oppresses.

7.9 Articulated Territory: The Production and Reproduction of the City as a Sphere of Social Reproduction

Reproduction and social production form a whole. The working or wage-earning classes require direct and indirect wages linked to social reproduction. Businesses—industrial, commercial and those providing public or private services—may physically be in local territory, but many of them are elsewhere. “Producers”, on the other hand, live in the same territorial area, city, metropolitan area or urbanized region. Their demands and rights are closely related to their wages, jobs, mobility, housing, etc. The vast majority of the waged or self-employed population are both workers and citizens. Citizen-oriented and production-oriented territories are articulated and almost always intermingled. Social conflict in production and reproduction go hand in hand for the social majorities. Citizens express themselves in public space and also in sites of production, including not only the workplace but also their urban life environments. It is not a question of separating generic citizens from specific workers. In both situations, there is a diversity of social classes with different interests, but the vast majority of the population has the same needs: monetary income and access to housing, collective services, public space, etc. Active citizens and the working population make up a majority in the struggle to claim their citizenship and labour rights.

7.10 Political Organization and Recovering Active Society

Urban territory has different levels: the neighbourhood, the suburb, the city, the metropolitan environment, urbanized spaces without a city and the urban region. At each level, there are forms of cooperation and coexistence, of providing formal and informal services, of branches of public administrations and of political participation. However, the hegemonic sphere offering minimum sociopolitical guarantees is multidimensional: the metropolitan city, the urban region and the network of cities, depending on the territory. Representative political power, which determines the rules and directs big projects and the management of large services, must be

singular. However, at the different levels, it is useful for there to be associative or non-formal forms of citizenship, agents of production and public or private companies and representatives of political administrations.

The “city” in all its dimensions is both an institutional entity and a physical and social entity. Citizens in their diversity come together to seize and defend their rights. This multidimensional city must have a powerful political organization, in normative, executive, judicial, decentralized and participatory terms. But the city also has its other nature: citizenship. Active urban society is itself a force to cooperate with or to confront the government of a city or urban region. Together, however, they can establish contractual rather than hierarchical relationships with the state and, if necessary, confront it, or ally themselves with it. The multidimensional city is, or should be, a global actor. In order for this to happen, “the right to the city” can and should be truly achieved in this process.

8 Conclusion and Final Thoughts

The city is above all public space; public space is the city. It is both a condition and an expression of citizenship and of citizens’ rights. The crisis of public space is manifested in its absence and in its abandonment or degradation, in its privatization or in its tendency towards exclusion. Without a powerful, socially inclusive, physically and symbolically integrating public space, the city dissolves, democracy is twisted, historical processes that advance individual and collective freedoms are interrupted or regress, and the reduction of inequalities and the supremacy of solidarity and tolerance as citizen values are overcome by segregation and greed, by selfishness and exclusion.

Historical-cultural understanding of public space is a fundamental dimension of political and social democracy. Public space expresses the territorial dimension of democracy. It is space for collective use. It is the area in which citizens can (or should) feel as such: free and equal. It is where society is staged, where it speaks for itself, demonstrates its existence as a collective that lives together, shows off its diversity and contradictions and expresses its demands and conflicts. It is where collective memory is built and multiple identities and ongoing hybridizations are manifested.

Democratic public space is an expressive, meaningful, versatile, accessible and evolving space. It is a space that connects people and that regulates buildings, a space that marks both the character of neighbourhoods and urban areas and the continuity of the different parts of the city. This space is in crisis today, and its decline calls into question the possibility of exercising the “right to the city”.

The right to the city and democratic public space are two sides of the same coin. The current political and urban culture has revalued both concepts in our time, but institutional and media practices question them. The dominant dynamics in the cities of the developed world tend to weaken and privatize public spaces. Critical analysis is useless, and nostalgic lament of the lost past even more so if we do not

confront the economic, political and cultural dynamics that produce this contemporary city-less urbanization and denaturalization of public space.

The crisis of public space is the result of the current patterns of urbanization, which are extensive, diffuse, exclusive and privatizing. Public spaces lose their civic qualities and become mere thoroughfares, or tourist and leisure and museum areas, or they are turned into private streets and gated communities (that do not exist only in low-density suburbs) or guarded squares (video surveillance) in which the elements that favour living (benches) are removed and physical obstacles are created to prevent large gatherings. Lively and open high streets are progressively replaced by shopping centres in which the “right of admission” is policed. Centres and neighbourhoods that are not transformed following these guidelines become forgotten and sometimes criminalized spaces of exclusion. Or at the other extreme, they are gentrified and exclude popular sectors, first as residents and then as users.

This model of urbanization is a product of the convergence of interests characteristic of contemporary globalized capitalism: highly mobile finance capital, pursuing short-term profit, articulated with local financial systems; legislation favouring urbanization and real estate booms; and the private ownership of land with private agents appropriating the capital gains resulting from speculation. Local and regional governments in turn facilitate these dynamics, since they compensate for their lack of resources to meet the demands made on them through the sale of public land, urban permissiveness and the effective sale of construction permits. The “concrete block” (“il blocco edilizio”, a concept that became fashionable in the Italian urban thought of the 70s) closes the circle. These are the legacy of developers and builders who received easy loans from finance capital funds, which stimulated investment by the middle and lower classes, who in turn obtained loans through junk mortgages. A vicious circle that, when it encounters legal or social obstacles, corrupts local governments with impunity.

These tendencies in urbanization are reinforced by the upper and middle classes’ desire to distinguish themselves and mark their differentiated and privileged image and who simultaneously request the protection of exclusive areas. For their part, lower or lower-middle sectors of the population strive to achieve the (illusory) security that they believe they can find in land or home ownership as a form of saving for the future, but at high costs in the present. This is the myth that land and housing will always increase in value, and they will always be able to pay off their mortgages. Local governments, accomplices by either action or omission, find in urbanization a source of income and a certain social support. The urban culture inherited from the modern movement that decreed “the death of the street” serves as an alibi for many professionals to justify their participation in the feast.

But the party is over: urbanization in the coming years will not be able to follow the same path. It would be logical for a radical change to be implemented, for multiple reasons: the waste of basic resources and high social costs and the speculative irresponsibility with which global financial capitalism operates. It could be because it is expected that there will be a reaction from society demanding that governments act on their responsibilities, that they remember their obligation to regulate both the financial agents and large real estate agents that have received large amounts of

public money to get out of the very same quagmire they themselves created. It could be because malaise should lead to social mobilizations by those most affected by the crisis, the popular majorities who have lost their savings and/or jobs and who will demand a change of course from the neoliberal policies that have caused this crisis.

Professionals and intellectuals in general have a special responsibility in converting the current crisis into an opportunity for change in a more democratic direction. It is their responsibility to help develop radical critical thinking and to propose possible and desirable alternatives. This requires placing oneself outside the logic of institutional politics (government management, leadership of parties integrated into the system) and the official academic culture that predominates in universities today. Institutional politics and academia are characterized by extreme conservatism. Policymakers cannot conceive of or do not want to consider anything other than a return to the past. The contemporary university has forgotten its social responsibilities and has degenerated by limiting itself to producing self-referential knowledge, increasingly removed from reality. Social engagement has been replaced by a formalist methodology and by submissions to indexed journals armoured against criticism and innovation. The dominant academic ideology (in the most pejorative sense of the term) demonizes innovation, criticism, partisan positions and proposals for action in society.

In today's world, it is probably only possible to promote reforms. But for reforms to achieve advances, radical or, if you prefer, revolutionary thinking is required. This revolutionary thinking is oriented to action that modifies dynamics and behaviours that express structural inertias, including private property, land and urban areas as foci of speculation, political permissiveness and the complicity of local governments in relation to urban speculation and the ideology of fear that legitimizes social segregation and the privatization of public spaces.

8.1 Justification

This text is both a synthesis of recent works and a proposal for going beyond them by including the dynamics involved in cities confronting states and financial globalization.

It thus introduces citizenship as the basis of a democracy that cannot be reconstructed via the state or the constitution, but instead needs to be developed from within cities. The state is an abstract entity that is made concrete through the apparatuses of the political class and bureaucratic elite.

Cities as a perspective are from which to structure urban regions. They demand jurisdiction over themselves, with their own rules. Relations with the (central) state should be more contractual than hierarchical—with legislation specific to these urban entities, not dependent on “basic state laws”. Central states should transfer a large part of their financial resources and reduce administrative staff to a minimum. A Charter of Citizen Rights has no real value if policies are not applied to exercise them. Legal and financial instruments must be means to guarantee interdependent citizens' rights.

Citizen mobilization is a basic instrument to transform the policies that guarantee citizen rights. Citizen and peri-urban mobilizations and interstitial spaces, such as the *gilets jaunes*, and those of Ecuador and Chile, the United States, Italy, etc. Citizen movements should converge with local or regional governments supportive of democratization.

States are today subordinate to global economic, financial and commercial forces. In order to confront these global forces, states should not support local governments and citizen mobilizations, but rather the other way around. Local governments and mobilized citizens promote political democratization and citizen rights in the face of global economic forces. Central states should mediate with global forces while being led by local governments and citizen movements. In these processes, local-regional political institutions will be created, and pacts will be made with global economic forces.

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Democracy Beyond the Nation-State: From National Sovereignty to Pluralist European Sovereignty



Javier Uncetabarrenechea  and Igor Filibi 

Abstract European integration was a response to the different crises faced by European nation-states after the two world wars – a major political innovation that has made it possible to build a structural peace model, reinforce fundamental values and rights and establish a market that has been the basis of its economic prosperity. Following an initial phase of institutional development of the community model, integration, particularly since the Empty Chair Crisis, has drifted towards an increasingly intergovernmental model in greater tension with the foundational supranational spirit. In recent years, Europe has again found itself faced by enormous challenges (economic crisis, Brexit, pandemic, rise of new powers, etc.). On this occasion, the EU has succeeded in adopting an Economic Recovery Plan that includes an ambitious EU debt programme to finance projects of recovery and structural transformation of the EU economy. Moreover, for several years the EU has been engaged in a debate on its future, which began with the Commission’s White Paper in March 2017 and will culminate in 2022 with the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE). However, the interesting concepts included in the debate – strategic autonomy, European sovereignty – run the risk of limiting their scope to functional developments, without sufficient exploration of democratic aspects. Furthermore, the concept of European sovereignty, if restricted to a replication of state sovereignty on a European scale, would find its transformative and democratic potential significantly curtailed.

Keywords European sovereignty · European integration · European federalism · European democracy · Sovereignty · Intergovernmentalism

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Political scales, when they transcend the state framework, should address the question of sovereignty. For this reason, it is essential to refer to sovereignty in order to consider democracy on a larger scale.

European integration initially contrasted the national vision, based on the state as the only (and identifying) political reference framework, with a supranational vision, in favour of transcending that political framework and constructing a European federation, a United States of Europe. The first vision took for granted that the only possible framework for a democracy was the nation-state, so cooperation between states, while sometimes necessary in different spheres, should be limited to technical and functional issues, without questioning the state-based political framework and the legitimacy of the nation (the people) as the only possible *demos*. The second vision questioned the latter and indicated the need to construct a new political framework, a scale in keeping with the enormous challenges of the twentieth century that would attain sufficient critical mass to compete with the colossi that had emerged (USA, USSR). This political framework had to be democratic, but the concepts under consideration were inspired by the only available example: the United States. The North American federation, as we know, after beginnings marked by the wide debate among the Founding Fathers as reflected in The Federalist Papers, soon adopted a Hamiltonian approach and accepted the model of nation-state that prevailed in international society at the time, with a largely unique sovereignty. In the opinion of Jürgen Habermas, “today all federations have adapted themselves more or less to the nation-state model; the United States, too, has become a federal state at the latest since the end of the Second World War” (Habermas, 2012: 32).

Thus, European federalism, with a few exceptions such as the young non-conformists of the 1920s, proposed a European federation based upon the North American case. Over time, however, both visions have modified their tenets, evolving as the process of integration advanced.

On the one hand, many nationalists have come to accept the fact that European integration should include strong forms of cooperation between states, including legal obligations that limit sovereignty, more on grounds of efficiency than due to a genuine conviction regarding the need to limit sovereignty. Nonetheless, especially in the wake of the crisis of 2008 and with doubts in relation to the capacity of European institutions to address such challenges, part of the population yearns for a return to the idealised sovereign state. The fear and uncertainty generated by the crisis have encouraged the idea that there is a need to “recover control”, and, in our political and cultural context, this “equates to the sovereign recovery of the nation-state” (Arias Maldonado, 2020: 16).

On the other hand, European federalism has in turn moved away from more ideological and formal models to accept that integration should be based on the solution of specific problems, that it should demonstrate its usefulness in areas where states, on their own, are incapable of effective action. Somehow, traditional European federalism has acknowledged that the problems of the state, which exist and are structural, are not sufficient to justify a European federation, since the latter must demonstrate its usefulness before being accepted by a majority of the population and by governments.

In the current context, marked by two enormous crises in succession (financial and economic from 2008 to 2019 and COVID from 2020 to 2021), the concept of European sovereignty has emerged as a compass to guide continued development of the project of integration as the only response to the challenges facing Europe. In our opinion, this debate is a necessary, but insufficient, innovation with which to tackle these challenges. The European institutions will have to increase their power in some areas in which state governments have repeatedly shown themselves to be incapable of offering a solution. However, the increased power of the EU institutions could entail risks, such as reinforcement, in the name of efficiency, of a technocratic Europe that would ultimately replicate the limitations of the monistic conception of state sovereignty.

This is why the debate over Europe cannot be restricted to the application of the current notion of monistic state sovereignty at the European level. There is a need for a profound debate that considers a pluralist conception of sovereignty. European sovereignty should be more efficient than national sovereignties – this was the essential reason for the creation of European integration – and should also constitute a conceptual innovation that leads to an increase in democracy. This is the core of the question, as an indisputable principle of European politics should be its democratic nature. It is important to stress this point in a context in which one is witnessing an erosion of numerous democracies and in which some regional (Brazil, Turkey, Iran, etc.) and global (China, Russia, India) powers are more and more inclined to defend undemocratic values and behaviour.

The challenge facing European democracy therefore involves reshaping the old concept of national-state sovereignty in such a way as to make possible the creation of a new European sovereignty, compatible with states and nations, but at the same time capable of creating a solid political framework and of acting effectively in those spheres that are necessary at a European level.

To this end, in this chapter, we will first present a brief reflection upon the evolution of the concept of sovereignty into national sovereignty and upon the contradiction between a monistic and a pluralist conception of sovereignty that, with the triumph of the former, eventually created a contemporary world of nation-states that only posited the possibility of a democracy upon the existence of a single demos. Secondly, we will see how a major crisis within this model, particularly after World War Two, favoured a series of profound innovations that prompted profound political innovation in the countries of Western Europe, the main consequence of which was a questioning of that monistic vision with the proposal, within the European Communities, of a model that involved sharing sovereignty within a supranational organisation. Thirdly, we will briefly review the history of the integration process and observe how, basically since the 1970s, as that sensation of threat faded with economic growth and the thawing of the Cold War, and after the Empty Chair Crisis of 1966, an era began of difficult equilibrium between the supranational and the inter-governmental, marking the future of the integration process. We will then analyse how this unstable equilibrium has entered a profound crisis, fundamentally during the last decade. Finally, we suggest the need for an answer that constitutes an innovation in political and democratic terms, advocating a pluralist European sovereignty.

1 From Sovereignty to National Sovereignty: The Tension Between Monism and Pluralism

During the Middle Ages, the medieval world moved slowly from the idea of the city of God, universal and hierarchical, to a system of compartmentalised and particular sovereignties. The Papacy supported monarchs against the Emperor's power, thus encouraging the emergence of national powers. When the King of France argued that "*rex superiorem non recognoscens in regno suo est imperator*" (the king recognises no superior, in his kingdom he is emperor), he was simultaneously declaring two different principles: on the one hand, he was attributing to the king's absolute power in his territory, and on the other, he was denying the existence of a *civitas maxima* to which the king would be subordinated (Torres Gutiérrez, 1999: 998).

Moments of crisis, uncertainty and fear encourage political innovation, and the history of the concept of sovereignty provides a good example of this. Thus, the turbulent social, economic and political reality of the sixteenth-century Europe created conditions for a profound transformation, stimulated by religious wars. Sovereignty was, as will become apparent throughout this section, the response designed to end a series of constant wars in which it seemed impossible to identify a definitive victor (Filibi, 2020).

In 1517, Luther nailed onto the door of Wittenberg Church his 95 theses, thereby initiating the Protestant Revolution. The rebellion led in 1524 to the German Peasants' War, the start of an endless period of wars that would last 173 years, until 1697. This war acquired a particularly fratricidal nature in France, which was ravaged between 1562 and 1598 by continuous religious and political conflict. In this context of chaos, 4 years after the massacre of the Huguenots, Jean Bodin published a book in 1576 entitled *The Six Books of the Republic*, in which he presented a new concept, sovereignty, "the absolute and perpetual power of a Republic", intended to reinforce the King's authority, to mediate between factions and to ensure peace and order. In spite of the distinction between sovereignty and government, he always insisted that "sovereign authority should be absolute, perpetual and indivisible" (Andrew, 2011: 77).

In 1609, Charles L'Oyseau wrote his *Traité des Seigneuries*, a treaty on the different types of political sovereignty, and stated very clearly that sovereignty is the state's own *Seigneurie*, different from and superior to the rest. In the words of Bertrand de Jouvenel, "one can see, then, that sovereignty, as presented by L'Oyseau in 1609, is an extremely vigorous plant"; which can be seen in the *États Généraux* of 1614, where the idea of sovereignty "is absolutely confused with that of royal power" (Jouvenel, 2000: 189 and 196).

In the middle of another civil war, in England, which lasted from 1642 to 1651, Thomas Hobbes wrote a book in 1651 that would be another of the pillars of absolute sovereignty: the *Leviathan*. Hobbes argued in favour of a social contract and government by an absolute sovereign who would bring an end to war and establish peace. The author, who was born prematurely when his mother heard of an imminent invasion by the Spanish Armada, commented that his life had been marked by

fear. Throughout his life he had suffered from the division between factions, and with his work he sought to help to create a power so strong that it might end the state of nature, that endless “war of all against all”.

Without interruption, between 1618 and 1648, amidst numerous wars all over the continent, the Thirty Years’ War again ravaged Europe, involving all the main powers. It was a long and terrible conflict, decimating the population by triggering famine and disease. Finally, the combatants, incapable of winning or losing, completely exhausted, were forced to sign the peace. This was not, however, an act of tolerance or political grandeur; it was simple resignation to the existence of the other. In truth, the Treaty of Westphalia formalised “deferral of a genuine recognition, exploration, and engagement of difference” (Blaney & Inayatullah, 2000: 44).

This process is so central to the history of Europe that even the type of war adapted to it. In the first place, insofar as central power gradually prevailed, “private wars ceased to be tolerated, and war making came to be universally recognized as an attribute of sovereignty”. Thus, there was a phase of wars that might be termed *constitutive* (among which religious wars could obviously be included), since at stake was what kind of units political subjects would be. Later came a second phase of *configurative* wars in which the nature of the units was accepted but their precise territorial configuration had to be established. Finally, territorial contiguity was consolidated as an accepted principle, in central Europe at least (Ruggie, 1993: 162–163), albeit with exceptions, such as colonial territories, which in turn made significant contributions to the shaping of the modern European state (Branch, 2010).

The two great bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth century introduced substantial changes into the concept of sovereignty but also retained some previous elements that clearly recalled the absolutist nature it acquired from the seventeenth century onwards (Ferrero & Filibi, 2004: 10–11). The monarchic restoration after the Congress of Vienna (1815) appeared to restore the monarchic principle and a certain balance of power on a global scale that would favour the development of a relatively stable system. The era of absolute monarchies gradually faded as tension heightened, and there was succession of revolutionary processes during the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Thus, state sovereignty, embodied by the monarch, was progressively replaced by a national sovereignty embodied by the nation (Ferrero & Filibi, 2004: 11), and although the international order remained relatively stable until 1914 (Filibi, 2020: 122), the very generalisation of the model of nation-state eventually had consequences on the international stage:

In this way, a symbiotic link is established between the state as organisation of political power and the nation as distinctive political and cultural identity of a sovereign people, giving rise to the nation-state as the only socially legitimate form of political community in modernity. Thus, there was a reinforcement of the exclusivist spatiality reflected in the Westphalian formula: to the exclusivity of the state in its territorial jurisdiction was added the exclusivity of the nation as object of political identity. As a result, the society of states is redefined as international society and the units that interact become homogeneous national communities that defend their respective “sovereign” interests, which they regard as supreme. (Ferrero & Filibi, 2004: 12)

The French Revolution was accompanied by a profound transformation of the concept of sovereignty, but maintained a monistic conception thereof which made it possible, with the evolution of the model of nation-state, to develop a standardisation that the old absolutist regimes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could not even imagine, for example, in the development of systems of mass schooling. The American Revolution was different. Firstly, we should see it as a democratic rebellion but also as a war of independence against a European colonial power. In this sense, there was logical opposition to the political transformations that occurred in Europe from the sixteenth century onwards and resistance to monistic conceptions. Following the wide debate on these questions as reflected in *The Federalist Papers*, the tension between the federal state and the federated states apparent in several of the Supreme Court's early rulings,¹ the Hamiltonian approach gradually prevailed, and over time there was acceptance of the model of nation-state predominant in international society of the day and with a near-unique sovereignty. This evolution of the North American state suggests the emergence of a model of political organisation that became the canon, the standard of political legitimacy (Hall, 1999). As the model is consolidated, so is a system of social control that rewards imitation of the model and penalises deviations from the latter (Hurd, 1999).

The widespread implantation in Europe of the model of state-nation during the nineteenth and the early twentieth century facilitated the development of a state that was present in spheres of life (health, education, etc.) from which it was previously absent and fuelled the industrial revolution and a technological change that materialised in technological and military superiority that favoured imperialism and colonial expansion all over the world. Economic change enabled the state to opt for the creation of large companies in strategic sectors that allowed it to plan and develop policies of rearmament with the potential to take war to a new level. The model that led to the hegemony of European powers in 1914 culminated in, after just over three decades and two world wars that changed everything, a new context of Cold War in which the very survival of Europe was at stake.

2 Crisis and European Integration: Beyond Classical Sovereignty and the Supranational Model

European integration and the idea of crisis as an opportunity for political innovation have always been inextricably interrelated. The First World War represented an initial call for attention when it came to considering the European question in a different way. The interwar period as a reflection of a world (and a continent) in

¹For example, this is the case of the famous *Chisholm vs Georgia* (1793) ruling, which led to the adoption of the Eleventh Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, which was ratified in 1795 and established that “The judicial power of the United States shall not be construed to extend to any suit in law or equity, commenced or prosecuted against one of the United States by citizens of another state, or by citizens or subjects of any foreign state”.

transformation sought new instruments with which to address the construction of Europe. Thus, Aristide Briand, French Foreign Minister, proposed the creation of a federal-type organisation in Europe in the framework of the annual meeting of the Assembly of the League of Nations held in September 1929, as well as pledging to present the 27 European states that formed the League of Nations with a detailed plan along these lines. This was the origin of the so-called Briand Memorandum, presented on 1 May 1930, which contained a number of original elements with which to articulate ambitious cooperation within the political and economic sphere, though it did not address the issue of sovereignty.² The economic crisis and the emergence of more and more authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, combined with the possibility of a new, armed conflict on a European and global scale, prompted the failure of this initiative.

The Second World War created a suitable framework for the presentation of proposals that in another context would never have been launched, and which went far beyond any kind of cooperation, however ambitious. Thus, June 1940 saw a proposal for the creation of a Franco-British union that would involve the institution of joint bodies for defence, foreign policy, treasury and the economy, among other highly significant measures (Shlaim, 1974). The uncertainty did not disappear when the conflict was over, and the end of the Second World War left the darkest of horizons for a Europe that was devastated, bled dry and deeply divided, and which would endure further suffering with the Cold War. The possibility of conflict, this time nuclear, between the United States and the USSR, with Europe as the most probable theatre of operations, evidenced the need to avoid a Third World War and stimulated political innovation.

The debate over Europe became a central theme and the search for innovative elements imperative in order to provide an answer to the challenges of the era. These elements can be found in a vibrant, thriving European federalist movement that contemplated Europe's future with a substantially different vision. A good example can be seen in such relevant events as the Hague Congress (1948), where a wide debate culminated with the adoption of three resolutions in the cultural, economic and political sphere. The first important international organisation was the Council of Europe, entry into which was restricted to democratic states (see Chapter 2 of the Treaty of London³) which included a multitude of innovative elements and practical developments, particularly in the field of human rights, but which was shackled by the fact that it did not address the issue of sovereignty (Dayez, 1949).

The difficulty involved in all the states in Western Europe accepting the creation of new institutions that would address the question of European sovereignty and transcend intergovernmental cooperation is clearly visible in the complex process of the creation of the European Communities. At this stage, innovation materialised in the form of the Schuman Declaration, the ambitious goal of which was that a new

²See the text of the Memorandum in French at: <https://dl.wdl.org/11583/service/11583.pdf>. English translation: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/100books/en/detail/14/memorandum-on-the-organization-of-a-regime-of-european-federal-union?edition=en>.

³<https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/0900001680935bd0>

military conflict in Europe should be “not only unthinkable but materially impossible”. The key of the proposal was simple but at the same time profoundly innovative: share sovereignty in the framework of a supranational organisation in a limited – coal and steel – but strategic sector, given its close ties with war and processes of rearmament. This method revealed a clear diagnosis of the problem, an innovative solution and the audacity needed in order to put it into practice. Indeed, a monistic notion of sovereignty combined with the development of aggressive (state) nationalisms led European countries into war and disaster (Filibi, 2020). The Schuman Declaration inspired the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952 and, after the failure of the Pleven Plan, which sought to move forward in the sphere of integration in the area of defence, two other Communities (European Economic Community and Euratom) in 1957.

The innovative nature of the Schuman Declaration as a key factor in the creation of the European Communities is regularly highlighted by specialist literature. However, less attention is drawn to the fact that, in the years immediately following the Second World War and prior to the creation of the ECSC, a series of European countries approved a number of reforms, coordinated in their constitutions, which contemplated the possibility of sharing sovereignty within the framework of an international organisation (Brunkhorst, 2016: 15).

Thus, for instance, the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany of 1949 established in Article 24 that the Federation may, by law, transfer sovereign powers to international institutions (paragraph 1) and that “with a view to maintaining peace, the Federation may enter into a system of mutual collective security; in doing so it shall consent to such limitations upon its sovereign powers as will bring about and secure a lasting peace in Europe and among the nations of the world” (paragraph 2).

The original aspects of the Constitution of the fledgling German Federal Republic can be largely explained by the pressure and influence exerted by powers such as the United States, France and the United Kingdom. However, the 1946 Constitution that gave rise to France’s Fourth Republic indicated in its Preamble that, “Subject to reciprocity, France shall consent to the limitations upon its sovereignty necessary to the organisation and preservation of peace”. The United Kingdom, however, was not prepared to share sovereignty and, realising that the Six were going to proceed without its participation, launched an alternative project, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which proposed another means of moving towards European integration without surrendering sovereignty. Upon confirmation of the failure of a purely intergovernmental method, the United Kingdom applied for entry into the EEC, and this was formalised in 1973 (Filibi, 2019: 135).

The British were not alone in their misgivings with regard to the new institutions that were operating under the premise of sharing sovereignty within a supranational organisation. The launch of the Pleven Plan, with the support of Jean Monnet and benefitting from the momentum of the success of the European Coal and Steel Community, was evidence of the desire to make genuine progress with political integration, but ratification of the European Defence Community, born of a French proposal, was voted down at the National Assembly in 1954. Charles De Gaulle’s

accession to power in such an important country as France, in a context of collapse of the Fourth Republic and with the backdrop of the war in Algeria, suggested that difficult times were in store for the then fledgling European Communities. In fact, De Gaulle was in favour of ambitious European cooperation that would embrace such significant spheres as defence, but not at the cost of sharing sovereignty. The Empty Chair Crisis and the subsequent Luxembourg Compromise, which informally recognised the need for unanimity on the Council (in other words, a right of veto) when vital state interests were at stake, constituted a key moment in the history of the integration process.

The economic success of the European Communities attracted new states, which reluctantly accepted the idea of sharing sovereignty within a supranational organisation. Four countries opted to enter in the first round of enlargement, and all except the British subjected entry to referendum in 1972. In Ireland (10 May) and Denmark (2 October), the vote was favourable, but on 25 September the “no” vote won in Norway, and the government decided not to present the Treaty of Adhesion to Parliament for ratification. In the United Kingdom, Edward Heath’s Conservative government lost the elections in 1974, and the Labour Party promised to hold a referendum on the question; this took place on 5 June 1975, and the “yes” vote achieved a significant majority.

The European Communities found themselves at a crossroads in the mid-1970s. The Empty Chair Crisis demonstrated that there was a sector of the elites and of the population that was wary of the new institutions and did not wish to share sovereignty in a supranational organisation. However, the British, who had promoted the EFTA as an alternative to the community method, had to rectify and apply for entry into the EEC, since the latter was an effective means of achieving greater economic development. This tension between the supranational and the intergovernmental and the debates on the need to opt for a (more) democratic or (more) effective Europe marked the ensuing decades in the process of integration.

3 The Quest for a Delicate Balance Between the Supranational and the Intergovernmental: From the Post-Empty Chair “Crisis” to Progress Via the Single European Act and Maastricht Treaty

The more conventional visions of the history of integration tend to describe the period between recovery from the Empty Chair Crisis and the adoption of the Single European Act (1986) as a time of paralysis and stagnation. This vision underlines a reinforcement of the intergovernmental that made it more difficult to take decisions by consensus in a larger club, which grew in 1973 from six to nine members. Moreover, among the new members, Denmark and especially the United Kingdom were particularly opposed to the notion of advancing in a supranational sense. The

very creation of the Council of Europe, in 1974, initially as an informal forum,⁴ reveals in our opinion an undisguised attempt to reinforce the intergovernmental and in a way blur the Commission's role when it came to setting the Community's future agenda. In short, this period is traditionally presented as one of the major reinforcements of the intergovernmental, but one should not forget that during these two decades, steps were also taken, some of which have not met with the recognition they merit, to move forward with integration in a supranational direction. We would highlight two measures in particular: the constitutionalisation of the Treaties and the fact that in 1977 the decision was taken that the European Parliament should be elected via direct universal suffrage.

European integration did not lose the capacity to innovate, but although, in our view, the idea of sharing sovereignty in a supranational organisation was a positive contribution in a democratic vein, other posterior innovations merit more qualified approval. A good example is to be found in integration via law and "the constitutionalisation of Treaties" as a key factor in the definition of the community legal order. It is worth recalling in this respect that its two basic principles (supremacy and the direct effect) do not appear in the Treaties and have been developed by Court jurisprudence in a series of rulings that began in 1963 with the *Van Gend & Loos* case. Without going into great detail,⁵ it should be noted that this process was fundamentally innovative but questionable in democratic terms. Specifically, particularly shrewd was the use of the preliminary ruling as a mechanism of (limited) civic participation conceived in such a way as to permit the Court to develop its jurisprudence in order to favour increased possibilities of action on the part of community institutions. For decades, this situation was accepted even by the most Eurosceptical states, on grounds of economic efficiency focused on the central role of the Court of Justice in the functioning of the Single Market, and it is compatible with the complex equilibrium between the intergovernmental and the supranational (Uncetabarrenechea, 2010: 119–122).

The decision to elect the European Parliament via universal direct suffrage was a key moment in the history of European integration. The first elections were held in 1979, and this institution, although it did not wield great powers at the time, played a significant role in driving the process of integration in the mid-1980s, a circumstance that is sometimes under appreciated by specialised literature. The legitimacy of a first Parliament elected via universal suffrage, which culminated its mandate with the adoption in 1984 of a draft Treaty on the European Union (known as the Spinelli Project), represented a challenge to an increasingly intergovernmental process of European construction and reinforced the need to extend the integration process:

This was, without doubt, an important reinforcement of the democratic legitimacy of the European Community, enabling this institution to become an actor with the capacity to

⁴In 1992, European Council meetings achieved official recognition, and in 2009, after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, it was recognised as an official EU institution.

⁵For more information on integration via law, see Burley and Mattli (1993) and Weiler (1994).

make political proposals, as was demonstrated with the adoption in 1984 of the draft Treaty on the European Union (Proyecto Spinelli Project). Given the absolute control of integration and of EU institutions on the part of governments, the Spinelli Project involved the drafting of an exclusively parliamentary text, without any intervention by governments or the Commission, and was adopted by very large majority: 258 votes in favour, only 35 against and 23 abstentions. The political challenge was radical, since the European Parliament sought direct ratification of the text by national Parliaments. The governments of the member states reacted at the Council of Milan in 1985, invoking the article that established that revisions of treaties should be implemented via an intergovernmental conference, and immediately convening such a conference that would approve the Single European Act. (García de Enterría, 1995: 12–13)

The adoption of the Single European Act (1986) and shortly afterwards of the Maastricht Treaty (1992) initiated a period of major advance in the integration process with, for example, a Parliament that with every reform of the Treaties has acquired further competences but also the creation of an EU with increasing power, viewed with mistrust by growing sectors of European society. Increased integration did not necessarily mean a reversal in the intergovernmental dimension, and it is worth recalling that Maastricht included the first “opt-out” clause in the Treaties, permitting the United Kingdom to join the Economic and Monetary Union whenever it chose to do so.

The peculiarities of the integration process, along with growing criticism of European institutions, have led some authors to establish a (false) dichotomy between democracy and efficiency. The logic of this process of integration has created an institutional structure that prioritises negative integration and a liberalising approach and makes it difficult to define actions of positive integration (Scharpf, 2000: 64–96). The liberalising action promoted by Court of Justice jurisprudence is of a binding character, while, for a long time, it has been almost impossible to adopt corrective measures due to the need for unanimity on the Council. Even now, with the extension of the qualified majority, it remains a difficult process, and a broad consensus is still necessary (Scharpf, 2000: 86). Added to this is the fact that any reform of the Treaties requires the unanimity of the Member States; in other words, the reality is that any Member State can veto any change that it regards as detrimental. Thus, for example, and referring to a question that is very much on the agenda today, it is difficult to imagine a reform of the Treaties that involves the EU playing a more active and decisive role in the field of taxation being accepted by countries like Ireland, Luxembourg or the Netherlands.

The situation became even more complicated with a change in direction in the process of integration. Bastiaan Van Apeldoorn has pointed out that during the period in which the Single Market and subsequently the Treaty of Maastricht were adopted, there was evidence of the supremacy of what was termed the “neo-liberal constitutional project” vis-à-vis two other rival projects labelled social-democratic and neo-mercantilist, respectively (Van Apeldoorn, 1998). A crucial factor in order to understand the hegemony of neoliberalism both within the Single European Act and in the Treaty of Maastricht is to be found in the fact that the ground rules that drove the liberalisation of markets and the way in which Economic and Monetary Union is defined are clearly laid out in the Treaties and can only be modified subject

to approval by all the Member States. By contrast, the qualitative leap that occurred in cohesion policy in the shape of the incentive offered to the poorer Member States to persuade them to accept both Maastricht and the SEA requires tough negotiations every 7 years within the multiannual financial framework. In a favourable context, these nations are in a stronger position to negotiate their support for these reforms, in what may often be seen as a form of “selling” their backing:

... los instrumentos de política pública de los que dispone la Comisión Europea y las restricciones de competencias y de recursos de la Comisión impuestos por la sovereignty de los Estados miembro implican que la Comisión puede ser eficaz a la hora de promover la liberalización del mercado pero no a la hora de legislar la política social o de empleo a nivel europeo (...). Por contra, la Comisión ha progresado poco en sus esfuerzos por fomentar inversiones masivas de infraestructuras en el transporte transeuropeo como medio para crear empleo, en gran parte debido a que carece de autoridad para movilizar los enormes recursos financieros que se requieren. Allí donde existen recursos significativos para fomentar la cohesión -los fondos estructurales de la Comunidad- estos recursos han funcionado mucho más como pago colateral para “comprar” la inserción al mercado único de los Estados miembros más pobres que como distribuidor más extenso de oportunidades económicas entre individuos, grupos o regiones dentro de los Estados miembro. Por otra parte, estos recursos son escasos en comparación con los enormes fondos que podrían dedicar las autoridades públicas de los Estados miembro a objetivos regionales o sociales de no existir la regulación restrictiva de la Comunidad. (Smith, 1999: 128)

The growing criticism and questioning of the European project at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of this century prompted, on the one hand, reinforcement of the hegemony of neoliberalism in EU policies and on the other a moderate introduction of civic participation which did not include the possibility of modifying central issues on the Community agenda (Uncetabarrenechea, 2010: 128). There was increased criticism by broad sectors of European citizenry, particularly during the first decade of this century, which materialised in the failure to ratify the European Constitutional Treaty following the negative result of the referendums held in France and the Netherlands in 2005.

4 From Intergovernmentalisation of European Integration to Poli-crisis: Different Responses to Two Recent Crises (2009 and 2020)

The European response to the crisis of 2009 elicited deep dissatisfaction insofar as it was perceived as neither democratic nor effective. In this respect, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was requested, as an external agent, to participate in a process of disciplining countries on the periphery of the Eurozone that found themselves in serious difficulty. The word *troika* lost its original meaning within the small world of experts in European integration, related to the rotating presidencies of the EU Council, and gained notoriety when the time came to respond to the crisis in which two key EU institutions participated, the European Commission and the Central European Bank, which were joined by an international organisation (the

IMF). Paradoxically, the International Monetary Fund, clearly summoned to play the role of inflexible promoter of orthodoxy characteristic of its responses to the crises of the 1980s and 1990s, adopted a more open and flexible stance than the European Commission itself and a number of European governments. With the addition of the concessions made to David Cameron prior to the Brexit referendum, there was growing dissatisfaction with this way of building Europe, and neither a broad sector of European citizenry nor the European Parliament itself hesitated to voice their criticism and opposition.

All the limitations of this technocratic, liberal way of building Europe, with a gradual reinforcement of the intergovernmental dimension, were evidenced after Brexit, and the need for radical change was defended even by key institutions like the European Parliament. Criticism of the European attitude in the crisis of 2009 in relation to the periphery of the Eurozone grew steadily, and Juncker, addressing the European Parliament in a session held on 15 January 2019 to mark the 20th anniversary of the euro, regretted the “insufficient” solidarity in response to the Greek crisis and insisted that “we are insulting” Greece.⁶

The crisis in Europe has to be reconsidered in such a way that the basic concepts of democracy adapt to the context of this complex new reality of the European Union and a globalised world, in which profound political transformations are taking place (Innerarity, 2017: 11–12). Almost inevitably, we will have to think of democracy with the state as the fundamental framework, but in a global context marked by crisis and uncertainty, we must reconsider democracy in other terms. Similarly, it is time for change and audacity when driving political change. It is not enough to think of Europe as the appropriate scale to provide an effective response to crisis in a context marked by (post)pandemic. The temptation to sacrifice the debate on democracy in the name of efficacy may lead us into a reality in which we have neither.

The return to an idealised context of sovereign democracies in a Golden Age of the Welfare State is unfeasible for various reasons. A major obstacle is to be found in a world dominated by vast multinational corporations and numerous investment funds that have gradually transformed the reality of the global political economy on the basis of defence of their own interests (Picciotto, 2011). In this respect, Habermas warns of the danger that “technocratic regimes will continue to proliferate under the innocent label of “governance” as long as sources of democratic legitimation are not successfully tapped for supranational authorities as well. A trans nationalization of democracy is overdue” (Habermas, 2015: 57).

Going back in time, seeking protection in an idea of sovereignty that serves as a refuge from challenges, dangers and uncertainties present at every level in a (post) coronavirus context offers a false sense of security. As will be seen in the next section, it is not sufficient merely to move from state to European sovereignty; it is also necessary to define the outlines of a pluralist European sovereignty.

⁶Discours par le Président Juncker en plénière du Parlement européen à l’occasion de la séance solennelle pour célébrer le 20e anniversaire de l’euro. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/fr/SPEECH_19_425.

The weaknesses revealed by both the European Union and Member States in managing the pandemic have encouraged the development of debates that a year or so ago would have appeared impossible. The European response to the current crisis, though it has not met all our expectations, for example, in the issue of Eurobonds, has proven to be substantially different, as evidenced by the adoption of the new multiannual financial framework (2021–2027) and of the EU instrument/strategy for recovery in the wake of the pandemic (Next Generation EU). This new Budget includes extremely innovative elements if compared with its predecessors and provides a more solid base for the implementation of positive and humanitarian measures over years that promise to be decisive (Crowe, 2021). However, we should not underestimate the role that a corporate world can play in the short, medium and long term with regard to designing an international society favourable to their interests. A context of increasing external debt may accentuate the weakness of states and lead to growing subservience to the interests of these corporate groups on a global scale.

Ultimately, the necessary positive reassessment of the public as one of the major future challenges facing the EU should not be confused with a return to the state, which would be a mistaken strategy in response to the enormous challenges of a (post) COVID context. In the European arena and in geopolitical terms, European states (even the largest and most powerful) are too small to play a significant role on a global scale.

We find ourselves in a context of profound crisis that may favour transformations and innovations that are not always positive in democratic terms. This situation, marked by uncertainty and fear, presents us with a global ecosystem favourable to the development of more or less authoritarian “solution” that sacrifices democracy for the sake of security and efficiency and implies a regression in democratic terms at a global level. In the context of the EU, this risk is reduced but still exists. One might say that there is a double temptation when contemplating the past: on the one hand, to abandon or marginalise the EU in order to seek refuge in the state in the hope of magically returning to the Western Europe of the 1950s or 1960s and on the other to opt for a more or less partial return to the old technocratic method that involves a clear commitment to efficiency to avoid complex debates on sovereignty and democracy. As we shall see in the next section, it is not enough to propose a debate on European sovereignty on purely pragmatic grounds while barely taking into account democratic considerations – a debate that, ultimately, is simply a more elaborate and sophisticated formulation of that second temptation referred to above. In our opinion, both stances would be mistaken and counter-productive. It is time for a clear analysis of the democratic debate, and, as will be argued in the next section, consideration must be given to a pluralist European sovereignty as a formula that seeks to find a suitable balance between democracy and effectiveness.

5 A Democratic and Effective Response: Towards Pluralist European Sovereignty

Crisis has always been a powerful incentive for reflection and political innovation. As we have seen, European integration was based upon the principle that state sovereignty should be shared. This was an essential element of the French proposal made by Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet. It was certainly an extraordinary innovation. The French government's proposal (Schuman Declaration), to share sovereignties, closed the circle initiated by Jean Bodin 300 years earlier. Paradoxically, the very same concept that emerged to end the religious wars in 1648 was regarded in 1948–1950 as the cause of the nationalist wars of the twentieth century (Filipi, 2020: 123).

On the one hand, European integration made it possible to begin to speak of a European sovereignty, understood as the application of the concept that originally appeared in modern European territorial states on a larger scale, likely to prove more effective in solving certain problems that European states were no longer of tackling on their own: from ensuring peace to appropriately regulating the functioning of the increasingly international markets. In this respect, one can cite various authors who began to speak of the United States of Europe, in clear allusion to the United States of America. A good example is the article by Albert Dayez, published in the weekly newspaper *Le Phare Dimanche* on 7 August 1949. This text, entitled “A quand la ‘souveraineté européenne’?” (When will European sovereignty be?), indicated that the only way of constructing a European Federation was for governments to agree to share their sovereignties and create a sovereignty of a European scope (Dayez, 1949). Without a doubt, this was a major innovation, insofar as it applied the context of sovereignty, previously confined to a state ambit, to Europe as a whole. Dayez's conception of sovereignty was not very different from what already existed among states; he simply attempted to apply it on a larger scale.

However, as the integration process advanced and states began to share more and more sovereignty, concern led to a new angle of debate. National governments acknowledged their inability to address many issues on their own and understood that only by sharing their sovereignties could the latter become effective tools. The increasing power of the European institutions, particularly apparent following the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty, was a cause of concern for many European citizens. The Danish “no” in the first referendum on the Maastricht Treaty and the narrow victory of the “yes” vote in France provided clear evidence of this disquiet and placed the spotlight on the debate on the democratic deficit in the EU in specialised literature. The problem became more acute this century when the Union institutions began to lose their aura of effectiveness, especially after the crisis of 2009.

Criticism of the monistic conception of sovereign power is not new. John Gerard Ruggie (1993) observed that one of the characteristics of political modernity is the single point of view – the notion that power corresponds to a perspective of a sole subjectivity. The experience of European integration favoured the development of a critical vision of sovereignty. Thus, in the 1990s, authors like MacCormick (1999),

Bellamy and Castiglione (1997) or Walker (2003) questioned the very epistemological and conceptual foundations of sovereignty, particularly via a sole subjectivity in the sphere of European integration. In this sense, MacCormick noted in 1993 that in the recently created European Union, it was just as impossible for Member States to accept the possibility of a sovereignty exclusive to the Union as it was for the latter to accept that the sole sovereignty was that of the states themselves (MacCormick, 1993: 5). In this respect, monistic interpretations of sovereignty were incapable of explaining or understanding the situation of European integration in the 1990s:

It seems obvious that no state in Western Europe any longer is a sovereign state. None is in a position such that all the power exercised internally in it, whether politically or legally, derives from purely internal sources. Equally, of course, it is not true that all the power which is exercised either politically or normatively is exercised by, or through, or on the grant of, one or more organs of the European Community. (MacCormick, 1993: 16)

The questioning of the monistic vision of sovereignty in light of the evolution of European integration in the 1990s increased the possibility of going further. The traditional perspective of sovereignty could only conceive of the EU as either an international organisation or a state, albeit in its early stages of formation. Both visions coincide in the sense that they do not conceive of sovereignty beyond the state, since the latter, by definition, is neither divided nor shared (Avbelj, 2014: 349). Rather than the aforementioned traditional visions of sovereignty or that of those who believe that the very concept of sovereignty should be abandoned, Matej Avbelj underlines the advantages of what he calls a “post traditional” vision, which constitutes a redefinition of European sovereignty in pluralist terms (Avbelj, 2014: 353–359). According to this conception, the EU can be “a non-statist federation: a union”, “composed of 27 territorially sovereign States” and “a functionally sovereign supranational level” (Avbelj, 2020: 301).

In a similar direction, Sophie Heine speaks of the relationship between European sovereignty and federalism, indicating that this duality was necessary in order to rescue political agency, the effective capacity to act (Heine, 2015). Thus, she claims that “a euronationalist perspective would create artificial divisions between a valued ‘us’ and devalued ‘them’, thereby opening the door to all sorts of exclusions and discriminations” (Heine, 2015).

In the British referendum held on 23 June 2016, 52% voted in favour of leaving the EU. The concessions offered some months earlier to Prime Minister David Cameron were to no avail, and that “Europe à la Carte” with an increasing governmental bias revealed all its limitations and shortcomings. At an institutional level, the European Parliament adopted a very active role in its attempts to resolve the crisis, and, thus, its Committee on Constitutional Affairs approved a document on 20 December 2016 establishing a diagnosis of the EU’s problems and an outline of the changes that needed to be made, including modifications in the Treaties, in order to solve them. It is significant that this document was adopted as a European Parliament resolution in its plenary session on 16 February 2017, as part of a battery of three resolutions that addressed the future of the EU: how to make the best use of

the Treaty of Lisbon, what changes to introduce in the treaties and questions regarding EU funding. It is noteworthy that, although it did not appear explicitly, the document applied an implicit notion of European sovereignty.

On 26 September 2017, the French President, Emmanuel Macron, delivered an important speech at the University of Sorbonne (Paris), entitled “Initiative for Europe”,⁷ in which he explicitly appealed for a European sovereignty, compatible with French sovereignty. Almost a year later, on 12 September 2018, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, entitled his contribution to the debate on the state of the European Union “the hour of European sovereignty”.⁸

Since that moment, the concept has acquired greater presence in academic literature, appearing in diverse papers, speeches and articles. By way of example, we could cite two particularly significant papers. On the one hand, in June 2019, Mark Leonard and Jeremy Shapiro published a text entitled “Strategic sovereignty: How Europe can regain the capacity to act”, in which, like Sophie Heine some years earlier, they referred to the concept as the best instrument to facilitate effective capacity on the part of the European Union to act in a constantly changing and increasingly hostile international context. On this occasion, the concept coined was *strategic sovereignty* (Leonard & Shapiro, 2019).

In a context marked by European states’ inadequate response to COVID-19, one could mention a European Council of Foreign Relations paper as an example of the success of the concept of sovereignty applied to the European scale, in this case in reference to “health sovereignty” (Hackenbroich et al., 2020).

Given the abundance of examples, the concept of European sovereignty appears to be here to stay. In all cases, there is a call for sovereign capacity on a European scale, though no one denies that states will continue to be sovereign (Heller, 2019). A common thread in the arguments defending this concept is that of recovering the capacity of public authorities to act, in a very difficult context, on major crises and profound geopolitical changes. As noted in the previous section, the response to the currency crisis provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic has been substantially different to that of 2009, and there is growing acceptance that Europe is the appropriate scale of action to respond to the challenges of a future marked by uncertainty.

The European Union is again experiencing moments of change, the magnitude of which is still unclear. A conference was recently launched on the future of Europe (with a year’s delay, as it had been scheduled to begin in May 2020), but the initial sensations have not been as positive as initially appeared, and disagreements between European institutions and governments threaten the result in a democratic process that was originally marketed as a dialogue on an equal footing between the institutions of the Union and citizens and civil society (Aldecoa, 2021).

Ultimately, European sovereignty has the potential to overcome the historical shortcomings of state sovereignty, provided this does not involve transferring the

⁷ Disponible en: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/europe/president-macron-s-initiative-for-europe-a-sovereign-united-democratic-europe/>.

⁸ Disponible en: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/soteu2018-speech_es_0.pdf.

old model of monistic state sovereignty onto a European political and geographical scale. In order to prosper, it should be born with the will to develop a pluralist vision of sovereignty, not merely a discursive strategy aimed at giving greater capacity of action to the Union without addressing in parallel manner a substantial advance in democratic terms. European sovereignty presents the possibility, conceptually speaking, of significantly enriching European democracy, but this will only be possible if this question is on the agenda and is taken seriously from the very beginning.

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The Construction of a Global Democracy Through Peoples' Participation on the International Stage: The Case of the International Peoples' Assembly (IPA)



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Abstract Increasing peoples' participation on the international stage has become particularly important in recent decades. From the protests in Seattle against the WTO summit in 1999 to the consolidation of counter-summits or international structures like La Vía Campesina, the articulation and participation of civil society in the context of specific international proposals respond to a loss of legitimacy on a global scale on the part of liberal democracy and to a need to redirect the course of democracy towards a model based on participation in order to guarantee social justice or equality.

Continuing in this vein, in this work we will analyse the case of the International Peoples' Assembly (IPA) as a new peoples' proposal of articulation of progressive and revolutionary forces on every continent.

In a work focused from a global perspective, we will examine the potential relevance of the IPA with a view to achieving objectives that are extremely difficult to attain within the framework of the nation-state, such as the goal of establishing a counter-hegemony that is strong enough to reverse the power relationships that currently favour the interests of corporate capitalism.

Keywords Transnational peoples' movements · Counter-hegemony · Real democracy

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1 Introduction

New information and communication technologies have been accompanied by, in some respects, greater power for individuals, in particular, and for civil society, in general. In this context, an increasing number of actors are questioning the neoliberal capitalist *status quo*, states are losing a degree of centrality in the international system and bourgeois democracy is suffering a profound crisis of representativeness and legitimacy.

We are therefore facing a new landscape of international relations, in which transnational peoples' movements (TPMs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have emerged as significant new non-state actors within the international system. In turn, we are witnessing the birth of new forms of international organisation that do not strictly respond to the logic of capital accumulation or legitimisation of existing international structures.

Since democracy is one of the main losers in the capitalist, globalised world system, we will seek ways of strengthening democratic practices on an international scale, and we will see how transnational peoples' movements can prove to be an effective tool in this sense. We shall provide a descriptive vision, based on militant research, which will present an example of a TPM as a concrete proposal: the International Peoples' Assembly (IPA).

An articulation at a global level of peoples' movements, trade unions and political parties from a broad left-wing sphere from all over the world, the IPA is an initiative that originated with important peoples' movements in Latin America and the Global South in general. Since its creation, it has sought to promote forms of peoples' participation on the international political stage, via international solidarity campaigns or the creation of tools that might help to unify discourses and struggles.

Among these tools, we will find both proposals of collective mobilisation and initiatives of articulation with peoples' schools of political formation, alternative means of communication and an institute of social research at the disposal of peoples' and emancipatory movements all over the world. All these proposals seek to articulate, in our opinion, peoples' participation through local and individual counter-power struggles, establishing an attempt to create a coordinated and counter-hegemonic force in Gramscian terms, always with the goal of weakening the discourses and ideologies that legitimate the capitalist system and simultaneously strengthen processes of peoples' emancipation.

One cannot ignore the fact that in order for something to fall, there has to be a force that pushes it. This requires power, or in this case, counter-power, which renders indispensable the creation of hegemony. This is where the human being, critical thought and the articulation of the latter around the organisation of civil society acquire a fundamental role. Marx and Engels (1973) already underlined the fact that "civil society is the true source and theatre of all history, and how absurd is the conception of history held hitherto, which neglects the real relationships and confines itself to high-sounding dramas of princes and states".

On another note, with regard to the terminology employed in this work, we will prioritise the term *peoples' movement* rather than *social movement*, understanding that social movements respond to sectorial problems, in other words, address sectorial or one-off struggles (Gil de San Vicente, 2008). We, on the other hand, will analyse above all those movements that have comprehensive, strategic and constant vision, transcending “the narrow limits of the occasional” (Gil de San Vicente, 2008), in other words, peoples' movements. This is why we will also use the term *transnational peoples' movement* or TPM rather than the term *transnational social movement* or TSM, which is more customary.

The movements analysed will be, moreover, transnational; in other words, those movements that “construct a social space by connecting different countries or social units, that is to say, social formations. This social space, generally referred to as *transnational*, is created by means of symbolic and social links produced by the ‘unity’ of different social movements – of a sub-national, regional or local nature” (Bohórquez & Pérez, 2011).

In fact, the structural processes that gave rise to the creation of peoples' movements have always been global, but until relatively recently the organisational responses have been restricted to the state level (Arrighi & Wallerstein, 1999). Thus, around three decades ago, transnational peoples' movements began to be formed, especially those in opposition to globalisation, in order to provide a global response to global problems.

The reason for presenting this work in these terms is mainly the result of our observation that some of these terms do not abound in academia. We also perceive that Marxism, since its beginnings, has addressed peoples' movements from a global perspective, although it has not developed transnational peoples' movements as a concept.

Numerous authors recognise the need, in a capitalist, globalised world system, for revolutionary peoples' movements to coordinate in order radically to change the structures of the international system, but they struggle to find specific implementations of this proposal. We wish to contribute from this vacuum, because we believe that the International Peoples' Assembly is the most significant proposal put forward in this direction in recent years.

Following this line of thought, the objective of this work will be to underline the need for a peoples' internationalism, for the creation of international relations-based solidarity and mutual support for processes of emancipation everywhere, in the belief that the action of proposing purely local or national alternatives to the capitalist world system is a short-term solution.

We are therefore convinced that peoples' movements articulated at an international level help to create the conditions necessary in order to construct a scenario of democratic intensification or even a scenario of creation of a democracy diametrically opposed to bourgeois democracy, which we could call *real democracy*.

We shall therefore focus on the role that civil society can play in changing the course of history; the place that can be occupied by participatory politics, freedoms or public interest in the international system; and civil society's potential to be aware of its daily life so as to take comprehensive decisions in relation to the latter.

Ultimately, we will attempt to offer a vision of the importance of articulating the work on an international scale and of the opportunity presented by transnational peoples' movements like the International Peoples' Assembly to offer spaces of peoples' participation on the international political stage, always from a position of counter-power and with a view to creating a new hegemony.

2 Democracy in the Capitalist World System

It is traditional to think of democracy in terms of the nation-state, as if it corresponded to the government of a specific country to make appropriate use of that state's "democratic" institutions so as to guarantee favourable conditions for that country's democracy. From a state-centric perspective, it is within the state that the fundamental aspects that condition the life of its inhabitants are determined.

From a perspective of the discipline of International Relations, it is the state that for centuries has been the predominant figure in international relations, as representative on a global scale of the society that inhabits its territory and main actor in geopolitics.

However, based on the understanding that we live in a firmly established neoliberal globalisation, in an increasingly interconnected world in which the interdependence between states is more evident than ever, we observe that the perforation of state sovereignty results in a transfer of state power to private entities that transcend its borders, such as the financial market, transnational companies or major corporations. We thus witness the growing presence of technocratic governments that, far from channelling democratic demands expressed in electoral format, dedicate their efforts to the modification of state legislation to favour the interests of private capital.

All of this occurs within an international system that, in the words of sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein (2005), we can term *world system*. The world system currently in force, heir to the European world system that spread across the planet from the fifteenth century onwards, represents the very basis of the capitalist neoliberal globalisation definitively established throughout the world since the 1990s (Moghadam, 2019b).

According to the rules of that capitalist world system, there is a centre, a periphery and a semi-periphery that function in integrated and interdependent fashion, in such a way that there are regions of the planet that live in permanent sub-development in order that others might enjoy greater profits, privileges and accumulation of capital.

In neoliberal globalisation, the world functions on an integrated basis, every state has its role in the interstate system and there is considerable interdependence and a predominance of the neoliberal economic policies imposed by Western states or by major powers (often in explicit fashion via the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and other institutions created in the West or the Global North).

Throughout history, the strongest states (those of the centre) have created a series of political agreements to facilitate the economic exploitation of the weaker (peripheral) states, so that their resources are extracted, work is divided at international level and trade is organised in accordance with the interests of the stronger nations. Thus, the central countries remain at the top of the hierarchy and obtain profits by exploiting the resources on the periphery. Meanwhile, economic and political processes are never separated, and political capital is used as a resource to reinforce global and neocolonial economic exploitation (Balaev, 2012). This is how the central agents succeed in establishing and maintaining a structural inequality in the world system.

This situation leads to deep relationships of dependence between countries, preventing the countries situated on the semi-periphery and the periphery from experiencing a complete economic development that would enable their inhabitants to enjoy an improved quality of life. According to Puerto Rican author Ramón Grosfoguel, it is impossible to imagine a single country achieving economic development on its own, and the position it occupies within the world system (or its degree of dependence) becomes far more relevant than its domestic policies (Grosfoguel, 2003).

In this context, bourgeois democracy (through the hegemonic media, among other ideological tools) continues to transmit the idea that elections are the main instrument by means of which to guarantee democracy, concealing the systematic oppressions that continue to function independently of elections (such as poverty, patriarchy or racism).

Of course, during the course of history, there have been numerous protests and proposals in opposition to these diverse forms of oppression, although “movements of national liberation [on the periphery] and social-democratic movements at the centre of the capitalist world economy could [not] have engineered a greater change than the one they have brought about given their shared historical concern with maintaining and exercising power *inside* the inter-state system” (Arrighi & Wallerstein, 1999).

If one is pursuing a genuine reinforcement of democracy or, rather, the construction of a real, direct and peoples' democracy (diametrically opposed to bourgeois democracy), it is essential to bring an end to the prevailing capitalist system, in order to promote the construction of a society in which the interests of a minority (that accumulates uncontrolled proportions of capital) do not hold sway over the general interest of the population in leading a dignified life – a society in which the population has the right to decide upon every aspect of their life.

One cannot help wondering, however, how it will be possible to build that real democracy, if spaces of power and decision transcend the borders of states and if civil society does not currently have the capacity to influence these spaces. Faced by this question, it seems obvious that, if there is a genuine desire to transform the foundations of the capitalist world system, every peoples' response and proposal should be expressed in a multilateral sense, firmly based in the Global South and, undoubtedly, in a context of class struggle (accompanied by the struggles against the oppressions of gender, race, origins, religion, sexual orientation and nature).

Modern peoples' movements, meanwhile, were developed with the creation of the nation-state, and for years the latter has been the principal target of their protests (Della Porta & Tarrow, 2005), but bearing in mind the direct influence of the growth of neoliberal globalisation upon peoples' lives, it is more necessary than ever for peoples' movements to acquire an international vision and character that would make it possible to address the situation in a more satisfactory manner. Thus, "the impact of the globalisation of the economy is a universal [...] reason for the mobilisation of non-state actors" (García Segura, 1993).

In a similar vein, we consider transnational peoples' movements (TPMs) to be an interesting tool available to civil society and with which to influence international reality. American researcher Sidney Tarrow establishes a clear distinction between two different types of TPM, depending on their practices and objectives. On the one hand, he identifies *insider* TPMs, which would be those movements that act from "within" the system, and usually exercise influence as lobbies or collaborating with international elites, to the extent of being co-opted. On the other, the *outsider* TPMs (that act from "outside") tend to oppose the policies of international institutions and may even challenge their very existence (Tarrow, 2005).

Insofar as we are interested in speaking of the construction of a real democracy, not subordinated to the interests of local and international bourgeoisies, in this work we shall therefore focus on those *outsider* TPMs, to see how they can tackle the existing status *quo* in order to reverse the prevailing order. In other words, we will observe transnational peoples' movements as actors that function within the international system, with the capacity to mobilise resources, influence the dynamic of other actors and create the conditions required to bring about structural changes, connecting the local and the global level.

Bourgeois democracy and the system of representative democracy are suffering from a profound crisis of legitimacy, so this is the right time to seek forms of peoples' participation on the international global stage, the goal of which would be the articulation on a global scale of peoples' processes of emancipation and the creation of democracy. Because "global justice requires the democratic participation of the people to whom justice is supposedly delivered, if we wish to respect the equal freedom of all" (Gould, 2014).

2.1 Peoples' Transnational Movements in the Capitalist World System

Transnational peoples' movements usually employ a series of resources so as to participate in the international system, such as "parallel summits, own forums, international and regional social forums, protests, etc." (Echart, 2008), but face many challenges when establishing their objectives, if we understand that transformation involves creating true democracy, exercising society's right to decide in relation to every aspect of life, ending both the limitless accumulation of capital and

structural inequality, overcoming any kind of oppression (gender, race, religion, origin, etc.) or the materialisation of abstract concepts like justice, equality and freedom.

Furthermore, one has to bear in mind the challenge posed by the fact that states have such a predominant role in the international system. It is a well-known fact that many transformative movements have restricted themselves to management of the administration and of resources once they have attained government power, often without questioning the foundations of capitalism or without establishing strategic alliances with other states to change their position in the world system. *Outsider* movements, ostensibly, threaten the logic of the capitalist world system but find it extremely difficult to construct real alternatives.

In addition, many types of oppression incorporated within the system (for instance, gender oppression) are also frequently reflected in TPMs. Among other things, "Hyper-masculinity is a central ideological pillar of both neoliberal capitalist globalization and some forms of 'resistance'" (Moghadam, 2012). TPMs, therefore, have to tackle both external and internal challenges and limitations in order to achieve their goals and have to take advantage of the tools available to them in order to address the *status quo* in comprehensive fashion.

Among these tools, we want to place special emphasis on the struggle for cultural hegemony, in other words, the battle of ideas, and on the role that TPMs can play in that struggle. Following Antonio Gramsci's theory, Robert Cox developed a new theory of International Relations, the neo-Gramscian theory. According to Gramsci, the ruling classes exploit the consensus of the oppressed (more than physical force) to maintain a certain social order and so that the oppressed also defend the interests of the oppressors (by means of various mechanisms, like culture).

Neo-Gramscian theory also explains that it is possible to create a new cultural and ideological hegemony, powerful enough for the oppressed class to cease to recognise the superiority of the ruling classes, thus modifying existing power relationships. In other words, this theory explains that it is possible for the oppressed to form a new historical bloc that could present a new counter-hegemony via the battle of ideas and subsequently, depending on the balance of power, convert that hegemony into a new cultural hegemony (Cox, 1981).

In spite of the difficulties, transnational peoples' movements therefore have the potential and the capacity to influence this battle of ideas; according to some, "the movements have become an increasingly decisive element in the politics of the world system and have achieved their own successes" (Arrighi & Wallerstein, 1999).

3 The International Peoples' Assembly (IPA)

In this section we will consider, as we indicated in the introduction, the proposed international articulation of peoples' and social movements, progressive and left-wing political parties and trade unions from the five continents, the International Peoples' Assembly (IPA).

To understand its origins, we should focus on the 1990s, for it was during that decade that a series of factors combined and resulted in a certain degree of social upheaval.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of neoliberalism on a worldwide scale was met with a vigorous social response in different parts of the world, and that same historical era saw the emergence of various transnational movements and forums that are now a reference, including La Vía Campesina, the World March of Women and the World Social Forum. The WSF “was formed in a political space of resistance against neoliberalism, involving broad trade union sectors, peoples’ organisations, intellectuals, students, artists, clergy members, NGOs and political parties” (IPA International Operational Secretariat, 2019).

Within the framework of the WSF in Belem (Brazil) held in 2009, there was an initiative to organise a congress of peoples’ movement organisations, as some sectors had already begun to note that the WSF had begun to lose direction somewhat, since in a sense the NGOs had begun to control the process and avoid greater political definition. This initiative of reinforcement of peoples’ movement organisations within the WSF was given form in the “Charter of Belem”, which led to the creation at Latin American level of a continental articulation of peoples’ movements, currently known as *ALBA Movements*.

The need was identified to create this articulation, above all because there was a shared analysis that the last election victories in Latin America were insufficient to achieve structural reforms, “to strengthen the fight against social inequality, promote the distribution of the wealth and income produced on [the] continent, guarantee mechanisms of peoples’ participatory democracy, and reinforce national sovereignty” (IPA International Operative Secretariat, 2019).

In turn, this new articulation of peoples’ movements understood that “political formation, active solidarity between peoples, communication strategies, the reinforcement of grassroots work and peoples’ mobilisation” (IPA International Operative Secretariat, 2019) were fundamental in order to tackle the devastating force of capital but, at the same time, were insufficient if limited to the American continent. For this reason, significant efforts were made to extend frontiers and reach peoples’ movements, intellectuals, activists and militants on every continent, agents working all over the world for a fair and egalitarian society.

Thus, at a meeting organised by the Brazilian movement MST (*Movimento dos trabalhadores rurais Sem Terra*) at the ENFF School (*Escola Nacional Florestan Fernandes*), in the state of São Paulo, in 2015, a new transnational peoples’ movement was started up, that was to be called the International Peoples’ Assembly, which would begin to function in the Americas, sub-Saharan Africa, the Maghreb and Arab region, Asia and Europe.

A few years later, in February 2019, this new TPM celebrated its first global meeting in Caracas (Venezuela). Five hundred representatives of 181 organisations from 87 countries “met, debated, sang, chanted slogans and experienced revolutionary solidarity in the common struggle to give hope to the peoples of our planet” (International Peoples’ Assembly, 2019).

The International Peoples' Assembly, in order to carry out its work, has created a series of frameworks and structures, some with territorial functions and others with political functions (although, ultimately, there are many areas of common ground between both functions and they cannot be completely separated).

As well as the frameworks that exist specifically to structure the TPMs, some specific lines of work are also being developed within the IPA. For example, there is close collaboration with an international network of political training schools. There are many educational projects and schools all over the world (in Brazil, Argentina, Haiti, USA, Tunisia, Ghana, South Africa, Nepal, etc.) that usually work with the IPA.

These schools and projects work to offer political training to members of peoples' movements, trade unions and political parties, understanding that political training is a continuous process that goes far beyond conferences and workshops. They offer a method in order fully to understand the world and its structures, as they know that the more activists and militants are trained, the more effective will be their actions, at both local and global level.

Furthermore, in collaboration with the IPA, various peoples' media outlets are also being coordinated: Resumen Latinoamericano (Buenos Aires), Brasil de Fato (São Paulo), Peoples' Dispatch and News Click (New Delhi), among others. In this way, the IPA advocates the creation of peoples' media outlets as a channel of empowerment so that displaced classes can wage the battle of ideas against the established common sense and in order to construct peoples' organisation. Fighting the battle on that front facilitates the strengthening of grassroots work so as to intensify struggles all over the world.

Another important line of work that the IPA collaborates with is social research. In the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research, there are researchers from Latin America, Africa and Asia, with the goal of "promoting debate and reflection through critical thinking and from a perspective of emancipation" (International Peoples' Assembly, 2019). They explain that they wish to take part in the battle of ideas and build bridges between social and peoples' movements and left-wing intellectuals, creating a two-way process (International Peoples' Assembly, 2019).

3.1 Philosophy and Practical Policy of the International Peoples' Assembly

We have seen what the International Peoples' Assembly is and how it is organised, but not yet the basis of its political activity, how it sets its political objectives and what activity it develops in order to achieve them.

To this end, we shall begin by saying that the IPA is a meeting point for peoples' movement organisations, an umbrella organisation, a space of collaboration between different types of organisations in different parts of the world. Moreover, unlike the World Social Forum, the International Peoples' Assembly is open to the possibility

of working with parties and trade unions, as long as they are based on mass struggles and are in accordance with the ideological minimums of the Assembly.

However, in principle it has no intention of working with NGOs, since its analysis is that, on numerous occasions, NGOs do not question the capitalist world system or its form of organising society, opting instead to make good the shortcomings of that same system. In other words, according to this analysis, most NGOs, the large ones at least, are *insider* agencies that deal with the consequences of the failings of the capitalist system, and there is no prospect of their revolutionising the system. Insofar as the IPA has a more revolutionary approach, therefore, it has no particular interests in working with NGOs.

Thus, the IPA was formed to compensate for an evident shortcoming. Its creators identified, as Samir Amin pointed out, the need to create a “united front at a global level” (Moghadam, 2019a), without dogmatism or major internal conflicts, which, unlike the World Social Forum, would promote direct action and have a more explicit and radical, more transformative, political manifesto than the Forum, in order completely to eliminate the capitalist system and create a new system.

In this sense, it makes a series of proposals so that all its actions are directed, one way or another, towards the attainment of peoples’ sovereignty via the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggle; towards guaranteeing women’s rights through the feminist struggle; towards exercising peoples’ democracy by denouncing the bourgeois state; towards the defence of natural resources against the appropriation thereof by capitalist corporations; towards the abolition of financial capital, of tax havens and transnational companies; towards the defence of dignified and humane labour rights; towards the defence of the rights of migrants, refugees and diasporas and the struggle against the causes that provoke them; towards solidarity with political prisoners all over the world; and towards the struggle against all fundamentalism with a view to emancipation (IPA International Operative Secretariat, 2019).

For all these objectives to be achieved, the IPA considers that, beyond alliance and collaboration between movements and parties, it is necessary to articulate the struggles of the masses in as many countries as possible, and in order to reinforce those struggles, particular attention needs to be paid to the battle of ideas. An example of this is that all the lines of work that we have seen in the previous section (schools, communication and peoples’ research) make an important contribution to the battle of ideas in favour of a new cultural hegemony.

Moreover, the IPA attributes considerable importance to the articulation of internationalist solidarity. This is why it has organised various international solidarity campaigns with diverse countries, processes or persons, such as the Palestinian people, the Bolivarian process in Venezuela or political militants such as Ola Bini and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Another element to underline is the importance that the International Peoples’ Assembly accords the Global South. All these lines of work that we have just mentioned, for example, are based in the periphery of the world system or in peripheral or semi-peripheral countries, which is not a coincidence. Indeed, imperialism and colonialism are and have been some of the deepest structural oppressions in the world, and it is essential for the people and countries that have suffered that

oppression to occupy the front line if structural changes are to be implemented at a global level.

Researcher Jackie Smith and her colleagues have highlighted the fact that there is an increasing number of movements based in the Global South and a growing number of political and activist groups that condemn neoliberalism and offer alternative perspectives (Smith et al., 2016). Without a doubt, the IPA is a clear example of this trend.

Following this trend, one of the main lines of action of the International Peoples' Assembly is anti-imperialism. In fact, the first decision taken at the Caracas Conference in 2019 was that the line that would serve as a shared policy in the years to come would be the struggle against imperialism, for which an Anti-imperialist Week would be organised simultaneously throughout the world. In other words, it was decided that anti-imperialism would be worked on, not only as theoretical concept but also to take society onto the streets with that demand and express solidarity with countries directly under attack from imperialism.¹

For this purpose, in the framework of the Anti-imperialist Week initiative, the IPA has created a broader space in which also to work with agents external to the Assembly, such as São Paulo Forum, La Vía Campesina, the World March of Women or the Party of the European Left. This new framework of the Anti-imperialist Week, aware of the importance of the battle of ideas, is also contributing from the cultural sphere by means of, among other things, a poster design and publication initiative throughout the world.²

In general, with the International Peoples' Assembly, one can see the “new political cultures of opposition and creation” (Foran et al., 2017) and that there is no need to distinguish between *revolutionary movements* and *peoples' movements*, at least in the case of the IPA, because we see clearly that both trends or activities coexist, “as anti-systemic activity within what some call global civil society, in favour of a radical social transformation or a change of system” (Moghadam, 2019b).

In this fashion, the fact of articulating a peoples' voice at global level with unified demands, the fact of internationalising the struggle for the sovereignty of peoples, involves advancing towards a democratisation of international relations. In this sense, the IPA and the TPMs play a hugely important role, as they succeed in uniting local efforts at emancipation (via the organisations represented in their structures), create connections between different proposals and assign a global vision to struggles born of global causes.

We cannot conceive of the construction of a global democracy without local alternatives, and, in turn, local alternatives make no sense if they remain isolated, if there is no transformative vision that bonds all those forces in favour of substantial changes in the structures of the capitalist world system.

¹This week was scheduled for May 2020, but due to the pandemic caused by the spread of the Covid-19 virus, it had to be postponed.

²See the following links: <https://antiimperialistweek.org/en/exhibitions/capitalism/> and <https://antiimperialistweek.org/en/exhibitions/neoliberalism/>

4 Final Thoughts

Early in the twenty-first century, we are witnessing a profound crisis of civilisation as we have known it. It is a profound economic crisis of capitalism, not only economic but also ecological, social, ethical, etc. This is not a crisis that is easy to resolve. In Gramsci's well-known words, the old world is dying, and the new one needs time before it appears.

But what is the new world? Following the well-known phrase that was spread at the beginning of this century, what other world is possible? How should that other world be organised? In this context, peoples' movements are not very sure where to look for answers and, at the same time, carry a great responsibility.

Although it is not entirely clear who should constitute the transformative subject, what is clear is that it will have to be multilateral (to provide global answers to global problems), formed by the people (towards a true democracy) and with a solid base in the Global South (to tackle the centre-periphery structural division at its roots).

The class struggle will also be one of the solid bases of change, always from an international perspective, and, as far as is possible, the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggle will have to provide an opportunity for the collaboration of numerous sectorial struggles, without, however, placing some struggles above others and understanding that the struggle against any structural oppression is legitimate when it comes to transforming the structures of the world system.

On another note, women will be a key element of any future revolution (Moghadam, 2019b). "The making of such a movement will not be a simple task, and there will be objections on the part of many 'horizontalists' as well as those engaged in exclusive identity projects. But then, such dispersion and division are precisely what reinforce the capitalist world-system. A return to a more formal organising structure with clear political goals and a unified strategy to achieve those goals through alliances with like-minded political parties across the globe could finally pose a more serious challenge to the current global system and prevent its capture by the extreme right. The feminist-inflected world revolution proposed here could finally realise the dream that 'another world is possible'" (Moghadam, 2019b).

There is much work still to be done, and TPMs face major challenges but also great opportunities. In an era more interconnected than any other, movements will have to succeed in building those bridges on the basis of solidarity and continue transmitting conceptions that can transform the world through the battle of ideas. We do not know the exact capacity of civil society to implement substantial changes in the world system, but we know that capacity exists, insofar as most of the world's population is formed by civil society, the poor, and the oppressed. It corresponds to the transnational peoples' movements to exploit this potential.

The key to the revolution is not held by any specific sector of society, and the solution will not be provided by any one single line of struggle (feminist struggles alone, class struggles alone, etc.). Predicting where and when the spark will appear is almost impossible, as this could happen anywhere at any time. For their part, the

TPMs will have to be sufficiently flexible to maintain the revolutionary spark once it is produced, so as to maintain that tension and, as far as is possible, socially consolidate the changes caused by these sparks.

The capitalist world system that seeks an infinite accumulation of capital is not eternal, because no political system is eternal. Our generation may not see its end, but the system is not static, is in continuous movement, so change will come, and sooner or later, this system will end. Understanding that this is so, civil society and, specifically, transnational peoples' movements may have the opportunity to force, accelerate and consolidate change and, in essence, represent the key to starting to think of post-capitalism.

With regard to the International Peoples' Assembly, we believe that it offers a new framework within which to consider the transformative and revolutionary efforts of the world as a whole, giving meaning and coordination to diverse struggles that are waged simultaneously at a local level. In any case, major changes are not only in the hands of TPMs or, consequently, of the Assembly. It is important to understand that these are only instruments and that if there are not a lot of concerned and organised people behind them, they serve no purpose.

What the IPA has in its favour is, among other things, the fact that it represents a comprehensive project, not to resolve specific problems, but to transform the actual structures of the world. In this sense, it will have the flexibility to decide where to shine the spotlight at any given time and to act with flexibility in accordance with the direction that society is taking.

One of its main challenges is that it has to make itself better known and design more effective communicative tools. In this sense, it will also require greater political definition; otherwise, it is very easy for large peoples' projects of this kind to lose their way and end up becoming *insider* organisations.

Within this political definition, it will be vitally important to continue exploring the counter-hegemonic approach, not only at a discursive level but also in practice and with specific alternatives. In this respect, the IPA is aided by the fact that it combines, on the one hand, a global and multilateral vision in order correctly to analyse hegemonic trends in the world and think of global alternatives and, on the other, a local vision, close to people, so they feel that the transformative project also belongs to them and, in some way, that the alternatives reach peoples' lives (or that the alternatives that start from them acquire a global dimension).

On the road to real democracy, it will be fundamental to reconsider the very concept of representativeness. One of the IPA's strong points is that it represents many people, but this cannot indefinitely be regarded as a strength. If those "represented" do not undertake their own initiatives, the IPA might make the same mistake as today's bourgeois democracy, making in the name of the people the decisions considered best for them. If, in the name of pragmatism, society's radical and revolutionary approaches were too often excluded, the Assembly would immediately lose legitimacy.

If we are going to build a utopian, fair, egalitarian, non-oppressive, ecological, feminist, etc. society, it must be clear that, sooner or later, it will be necessary to strengthen decentralised projects so that centres of power are as close as possible to

the people and society can participate in a true democracy without losing the global perspective. If the International Peoples' Assembly does its job well, it can play a key role in the construction of that new society.

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Popular Power as Subject of Democratic Transformation: A New Power for the Emergence of Communal Democracy



Saúl Curto-López  and Luis Miguel Uharte Pozas 

Abstract Within the current systemic crisis is a profound political crisis of liberal democracy. Against this backdrop, all over the world disruptive and community social dynamics are emerging that project new forms of democratic intensification. In this text, from the theoretical perspective, we want to analyse popular power as community subject of transformation for the reinforcement of a model of communal democracy as an alternative to the liberal model. Analysing popular power is a complex meta-process that encompasses different spheres of action and collective organisation. After reviewing the historical appearance and the very concept of popular power, we analyse the emergence of popular power as a dynamic process in three dimensions. First, we analyse the gradual construction of a new type of power, confronted by established power, where different theoretical positions are considered vis-à-vis the idea of counter-power, dual power and popular power, and the dialectic relationship between the destituent, instituent and constituent strength of popular power. As well as the transit from “the taking” of power to construction, there is also analysis of the relationship between new power and state power and popular power’s relationship with the struggle for social and cultural hegemony. We then analyse popular power as a democratic project in opposition to liberal democracy, with consideration of some characteristics of the democratising practices of community dynamics. Finally, we analyse popular power, beyond the individual subject of modernity, as the construction of the collective subject that articulates

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different subordinate sectors and stems from social spaces currently organised to project new, more advanced organisational forms. New temporal, spatial, scalar and articulating logics are proposed with a view to constructing that collective subject. We conclude by presenting popular power as a process of dynamic construction of a new subject of transformation that develops political participation, democratising dynamics and processes of political change, via its own dynamics of self-construction and articulation.

Keywords Popular power · Communal democracy · Democratic transformation · Counter-power · Popular movement

1 The Emergence of Popular Power in the Face of the Crisis of Liberal Democracy

During the last 2 years, we have been witnessing a profound crisis of liberal democracy that has been characterised by lack of participation, lack of legitimacy, lack of representativeness or lack of interest on the part of large sectors of the population (Crouch, 2004; Rosanvallon, 2007; Hermet, 2008; Wolin, 2008; Posner, 2012; Harvey, 2012; Mair, 2013; Ortí, 2015; Castells, 2017; Laval and Dardot, 2017; Gentile, 2018). In response to the crisis of liberal democracy, in recent years and in different parts of the world, community and communal dynamics have been generated that question the liberal model and suggest a different approach in the characterisation of the idea of democracy (Ayboga et al., 2017; Fernández, 2015; Akuno, 2018; Ruggeri, 2017; Códigos Libres, 2016; Öcalan, 2012). Along with the idea of communal democracy, the notion of popular power is emerging with considerable force (Knapp & Jongerden, 2014; García Linera, 2016; Bookchin, 2019; Iglesias Fernández, 2017; Mazzeo, 2006, 2007). In fact, popular power pulses and beats in many of the communal dynamics being generated by different actors: sometimes in specific fashion, on other occasions indirectly, and even as a force enclosed in community dynamics. El popular power and communal democracy are not presented as a finished and defined model mimetically opposed to the liberal model but as an alternative possibility in continuous construction. Thus, the force that encloses these practices follows another more dynamic logic of continuous construction. In this way, “alternative systems can be imagined and problematized, but not through their ‘application’ (...) they are not applied”, but “emerge” (De Angelis, 2019, p. 99). Therefore, the idea of communal democracy should be understood more as the possibility of a possible future that is concealed in multiple practices and different dynamics that are rich and diverse in form, content, intensity, maturity of development or strategic development. Those future possibilities as a current emergence recall the ideas of concrete utopia (Bloch, 2007), Benjamin’s Messianic times

(2009), Wallerstein's Utopistics (1998), Wright's real utopia (2014) or Santos's Sociology of Emergences (2006).

El popular power as collective political subject of communal democracy is conditioned by the social reality that surrounds it and, in turn, dialectically conditions this same reality. Since the late 1990s, we have been witnessing a new cycle of social protests, deepened by the systemic crisis that erupted in 2007–2008. Since then, different territories have seen the development of popular and social dynamics that are highlighting the emergence of the community as a new social momentum that appears as a counterpoint to the increasingly extreme individualisation of neo-liberal subjectivity (Laval & Dardot, 2013; Ortiz, 2014). There is therefore a reappearance of community not only as a space of protest and grievance but also as a space in which to find solutions to many problems and needs resulting from the crisis (Úcar, 2012; Torres, 2013; Curto-López, 2019). The concept of community, however, is neither new nor concrete. There are many visions of community (Agamben, 2006; Augé, 2011; Bauman, 2003; De la Peña, 1998; Tönnies, 1947; Esposito, 2003). Among the subjects of a community nature, we find a great variety of forms, themes and even opposing ideological positions. Our aim here is to consider community subjects with the potential to reinforce the idea of communal democracy and, therefore, those subjects that develop an alternative emancipatory vision to the liberal vision, closer to the interests of the subordinate classes. From that perspective, we find a wide range of collective subjects: cooperatives, trade unions, political parties, cultural or social associations, local communities, peasant movements, indigenous communities, popular movements, etc. (Negri & Hardt, 2011; Patzi Paco, 2009; Fabbri, 2013; Escalante, 2013; Ruggeri, 2017; Uharte, 2019). Throughout this mesh of community subjects appears, in a transversal and qualitatively renovating way, the idea of popular power as a political space for the generation of transformative political subjects.

But what do we mean by popular power? What type of subject is it, and what characterises it? What does it contribute to democratic intensification from a different logic to the liberal one? What aspects are important in its development? ¿En qué escalas se desarrolla? To answer these questions, we have turned to different authors and movements that have addressed the subject matter. Popular power as power of the people can have politically different meanings. In recent centuries, the power of the people has been used by different constitutions as a depository of national sovereignty. This idea has been employed by the constitutions of nation-states in theoretical and ideal fashion for the development of the modern liberal state (Sartori, 2003; Rosanvallon, 2015). We want to refer in specific and real manner to popular power, “the real, concrete fact of a collective will, the real will of the cooperative of which Marx also spoke” (Mendez, 2020, s.f.: 7). Based on that idea, according to Mazzeo:

Popular power, generally speaking, refers then to all those historical experiences in which the subordinate classes (the workers, the poor, the marginalised, the peripheral) exercised control and power more or less directly, within delimited areas or in an extensive set of institutions and from patterns imposed by a more or less conscious and deliberate search for libertarian spaces and egalitarian relational patterns, qualitatively superior to those imposed

by the social totality from which they emerge and to which they are opposed. (Mazzeo, 2006: 64)

That idea of popular power, despite having been employed more clearly as a concept in recent decades, is not new in essence and, though not always under this name, has been in use since before. In this vein, Marx had already observed that the Paris Commune of 1871 represented a qualitative leap in terms of both the organisation and the prospect of direct self-government of the oppressed classes: “The Commune was essentially a government of the working class, the result of the struggle of the producing class against the appropriating class, the political form under which the freedom of labour could be attained being at length revealed” (Marx, 2003: 71). From that point onwards and until the second half of the twentieth century, at different moments, during different social processes and in different places, general or partial experiences have developed that were based on the idea of direct, communal management and administration by the subordinate classes. Some of these larger experiences have aspired to structural changes, and others, smaller and more partial, have seen the proposal of more specific alternatives to meet specific needs (Azzellini & Ness, 2017). From the 1960s onwards, with the processes of decolonisation and independence, with the emergence of new social movements and national liberation movements, the idea of popular power is manifested in new practical and theoretical experiences – experiences like the Cordones Industriales in Chile, the Black Panthers in the USA, the independence process in Vietnam, the fight against apartheid in South Africa, the Cuban Revolution, May 68, etc. In the last two decades, the idea of popular power is back on the table, along with dynamics and counter-hegemonic disruptive collective action combined with processes that reinforce or are a reinforcement of the idea of communal democracy.

One can begin to delimit the idea of popular power by considering its two concepts. *Power* is not an object in itself, but a relationship that is formed between subjects and normally results in patterns of power that reproduce situations of domination (Sánchez, 1989; Foucault, 1979; Castells, 2009; Bourdieu, 2000; Villoro, 1997). Those in power eventually have privileges over the oppressed. Popular power seeks to become a power because it wants to dispute power with the dominant class, not in order to dominate but in order to end domination. In this way, popular power can have no “other objective than a society without domination” and a reversal of power relations (Mendez, 2020, s.f.: 7) – a power for a project of emancipation and of suppression of domination, not for domination (Caviasca, 2011). The popular in popular power refers to the people, to the plebeians, to those below, to the working class social majority in situations of exclusion or marginalisation or who suffer from different types of oppression, but also to those sectors with a conscience that, from their positions of less exclusion or greater privilege, engage with the masses in the quest for emancipation (Stratta & Barrera, 2009; Romero, 1991; Gómez Vilalr, 2011; Errejón, 2015; Cobo, 2002). The social reality of workers is increasingly fragmented and heterogeneous, generating different capitalisations of power in the pluri-dimensional representation of the fields of domination to which Bourdieu (2002) referred. That involves the field of “the popular” leading us to complex and

different expressions, realities, values and diverse positions that arise in relation to different axes of exploitation and oppression.

Popular power, apart from as a project for emancipation and as an articulating popular subject, is clearly characterised as a process – a complex process that includes in its interior different types of processes that exercise mutual influence upon one another: processes of self-organisation, democratic and deliberative processes, processes of production and reproduction, of resource management, of struggle, of construction, of offensives, of defences, of knowledge transmission, of development of political awareness, etc. According to Mazzeo:

Popular power is the process by means of which the places of life (of work, of study, of recreation, etc.) of the subordinate classes turn into a constituent cell of an alternative, liberating social power that enables them to gain positions and modify the disposition of power and the correlation of forces and, of course, progress in the consolidation of a counter-hegemonic field. (Mazzeo & Stratta, 2007: 11)

Popular power, like communal democracy, becomes a space and living process of experimentation that “can foreshadow the forms and content of the new society” (Caviasca, 2007: 46). Marx and Gramsci underlined the power of the Paris Commune and of factory councils, respectively, due to the scope of their prefigurative politics of future societies in the present (Ouvina, 2007: 166). Experiences of popular power appear as spaces of “social and political anticipation, inhabited by the possible real” facilitating new openings (Mazzeo & Stratta, 2007: 12). Thus, popular power can be studied as part of the sociology of emergencies, since it “produces possible experiences, which do not arise because there are no alternatives for it, but are possible and already exist as an emergency”. We are not speaking of an abstract future, but of a future “of which we have clues and signs; we have people involved, dedicating their lives – often dying – to those initiatives”. In this way, the sociology of emergencies “enables us to abandon that idea of a future without limits and replace it with that of a specific future, based on these emergencies: this way we are building the future” (de Sousa Santos, 2006: 31). For this reason, popular power as a process of construction of the new

Is conceived of as a prefigurative and inaugural space of the new society and as a moment of historical materialisation – always partial, always incomplete, of absolute utopia. This notion acknowledges that utopia is nothing if it does not target the “here and right now”. In this fashion, metamorphoses into rupture, into the moment of gestation and anticipation of what is yet to be. This is a utopian present that works to shorten the distance between subject and object. (Mazzeo, 2006: 79)

The prefigurative is not inherent to any popular dynamics, but is linked to a “political decision” to wish to construct the new, and is therefore “a conscious labour” of popular power “and not so much with immanent principles or with structural forms of determinism” (Mazzeo, 2006: 154). It thus forms a part of what Bloch would call “concrete utopia” identified as “that which is not yet, which in the core of things drives towards itself, which awaits its genesis in the tendency-latency of process” (Bloch, 2007: 507). Thus, popular power “makes libertarian utopia possible and not the other way round. Because popular power is the form assumed by the present

trend towards the future society”. This emergency shortens the time before the future and the present (de Sousa Santos, 2006). On this journey, the practices that construct popular power “are bearers of a new institutionality that preannounces the forms of the society of the future” (Mazzeo & Stratta, 2007: 13).

We want to focus on popular power as an emergent process in three structural aspects of its configuration and development: the construction of a new type of power, popular power as a project and popular power as subject.

2 The Construction of a New Kind of Power

Popular power, insofar as it is the construction of an emerging power and is set against established power, can also be seen as a gradual process that passes through different stages. Modonesi presents three dimensions of power and a trajectory where popular power as emergency can be forged and developed. The first dimension is *power-over* as relations of domination, the second dimension is *power-against* as practices of antagonism and the third dimension is *power-to do* as a collective, autonomous capacity of creation (Modonesi, 2009). This idea links up with the idea of passing from domination to conflict against domination and emancipatory empowerment. Thus, within the “formulation of an emancipatory project”, popular power would be passing “from subordination – as a state to be overcome – to antagonism – as a necessary conflictual and combative passage – and finally to autonomy – as materialisation, goal or finish line-” (Modonesi, 2010: 171). With regard to the idea of counter-power, we find various positions. While in Modonesi’s schema the idea of counter-power conforms to the ideas of *power-against* and of hostility to established power, but in a gradual manner related to *power-to do* or the autonomy of the actual power under construction, for Rodríguez, counter-power is related to the radical idea of ending the power of state domination. In this sense, he separates it from the idea of dual power, associating the idea of dual power with new state power. According to his approach, counter-power would assume both the dimension of *power-against* and of *power-to do*, since he sees counter-power as “self-determination: formation of social and political subjects, self-organisation of segments of life with their own political forms”. This would be “the immediate form of an organised social power”, being “by definition politics that does not admit mediation (representation, party, etc.). Counter-power is “pure affirmation”, “positive self-determination” (Rodríguez & Fernández, 2017: 98). It is removed from the idea of reconciliation, underlining the founding idea of new powers from below (Rodríguez, 2018: 198).

Negri’s idea of counter-power ties in well with the two positions described above. For him, the idea of counter-power incorporates three meanings: “resistance against old power”; “insurrection” as “a form of mass movement” that “merges different forms of resistance” and as event and “the constituent power of a new power”. Thus, while “insurrection is a weapon that destroys the enemy’s way of life, constituent power is the force that organises new forms of life in positive fashion” (Negri, 2001:

83–84). Here the notions of resistance and insurrection would be related to the ideas of power-*against* and power-*over* of domination and the notion of constituent power to that of power-*to do* as a constructive force. He coincides with Rodríguez, emphasising that the objective of popular power is not to “seize and take control of old power but develop a new power of life, of organisation and of production” (Negri, 2001: 88). Atilio Borón presents a criticism of Negri’s arguments with regard to counter-power (2001) and those laid out by Negri along with Hardt in their book *Imperio*. Borón criticises their reading of the insurgent processes of modernity, which characterises them according to only one of the three notions they assign to counter-power (insurrection) and suggests the illusory nature of the insurrectional character of postmodernity owing to the minor degree of internationalisation of processes (Borón, 2003: 6). Reviewing experiences during the twentieth and early twenty-first century, Borón argues that the insurrectional character of different struggles can always be latent in different situations if the necessary conditions exist. He also considers that the three notions they propose within the idea of counter-power is not far from the strategy developed by the Bolsheviks between February and November 1917 but also in the factory councils to which Gramsci refers (Borón, 2003: 10).

In these debates, there is counter-position of and dissociation between the idea counter-power and the idea of a process of construction of power itself, where a situation of dual power would arise, an idea that was developed by Lenin and Trotsky (Caviasca, 2007). Thus, there is concealment of the contention that one cannot aspire only to seizing the state apparatus in order to change it, but one simply has to fight against it. These debates between the extremes of autonomism and orthodox Marxism are transcended by means of approaches that reject the two routes and in turn integrate them within a superior approach: in the construction of popular power, the struggle “against, with and beyond the state” is necessary and complementary (Rodríguez, 2007). For this reason, “conceiving of popular power as emanating from the state is as childish as conceiving of it without the latter” (Mazzeo & Stratta, 2007: 12). One can and must work from within the state and against the state simultaneously, inasmuch as the masses’ capacity for self-government is increased. According to that conception, the idea of dual power is not contrasted with counter-power with Modonesi’s idea of *power-to do*, with Rodríguez’s idea of counter-power as self-determination or with Negri’s constituent power. However, rather positing this self-affirmation only from the “edges”, it is posited “in parallel and towards the heart of the structures” of the future society under construction. This is why “double power materialises in the existence of a new institution that disputes the functions of the old bourgeois institutionality, and we say ‘towards’ because these new institutions tend to eliminate the old ones and encompass the integrality of society”. That is why the “advance of double power involves the weakening of the old state and old society” (Caviasca, 2007: 46). From that dynamic perspective, the idea of double power is not in contradiction with counter-power or popular power, but with a necessary stage fuelled by both.

In line with the above reflections, the creative force of popular power increases as it deepens in procedural and progressive fashion its capacity to combine its

power-against (hostility towards the present) with its *power-to do* (the creative power of the new). This recalls the interaction between notions of destituent, instituent and constituent power. Regarding the idea of the force of instituent power (Castoriadis, 1989, 1997), there are stances such as Agamben's (2013, 2018) or collective interpretations such as those of the Invisible Committee (2015, 2017), which emphasise destituent power and advocate the latter as a structural characteristic of alternative movements, contrasting it with constituent or instituent power. Negri proposes a reading of constituent power that is different from the classic, static interpretation that identifies it only with the founding constitutional processes of modern states. Thus, they present a constituent power that transcends the constituted power itself, with a capacity for continuous self-constitution (Negri, 1994). This idea of construction of popular power as self-constitution reinforces the idea of a process of construction of *power-to do* based on the capacities themselves, on self-construction.

The idea of popular power has been questioning the orthodox, static way of understanding the strategy of power. Throughout the twentieth century, different left-wing movements were largely convinced by the idea that power was situated in established state institutions, and consequently, confronting and defeating power means "taking" the power of the state apparatus, whether by insurrectional or electoral means (Mazzeo, 2007; Rauber, 2004). From a more heterodox and dynamic vision that has been developed from both libertarian and Marxist positions, a strategy of power is proposed that passes from the idea of the "taking of power" to the "construction of power". From this perspective, "a social revolution is not the 'taking of power' designed and directed by a political elite (be it via reformist or political-revolutionary means), but the real *production* of another form of power that, consequently, corresponds to the 'dissolution' of the old society" (De Angelis, 2019: 98). For this reason, the shift from the "taking" to the "construction" of power "equates to transforming the modalities of the struggle on the political stage". It is no longer a question of organising social sectors so they participate in the armed struggle or the electoral battle, but of "conceiving of political subjects whose pursuit is a growing accumulation of local and territorial power, which construct a society and a state upon the basis of a new democracy". From this standpoint, agencies or nuclei of popular power as "constructed power, power born of creative human activity and the radical actions of supportive subjects" generate a context conducive to

The development of a conscience capable of perceiving that social relations are not independent of individuals or the expression of the social movement as a whole; thus, they create the conditions for a social life outside the (material) nexus of capital, outside the value of change (that transforms relationships between people into relationships between things). They also promote rapprochement among subordinate classes, build or strengthen their organic unity and their status as opponents of capital. (Mazzeo, 2007: 3)

The state and the struggle for social hegemony are related to the construction of popular power. Both the idea of power and the idea of state are indissociable in modernity; therefore, "no discussion about power (in this case, popular power) could fail to mention its link with the state" (Acha, 2007: 31). The state represents

part of the portion of power of a complex totality, and in a strategy of construction of power, this needs to be borne in mind. Moreover, understanding the state in a broad sense, as “all the structures responsible for reproducing the hegemony of the ruling classes” (Caviasca, 2007: 40). Because of this, “the exercise of state power by the subordinate classes is an instrumental moment in the project to create a new hegemonic bloc” (Mazzeo & Stratta, 2007: 12). The construction of popular power is thus proposed as “the primitive accumulation of power” outside and inside the state, which would make it easier for the oppressed classes “truly to lay their hands upon a considerable part of the state’s power (state in the broadest sense)” to constitute dual power and become hegemonic (Caviasca, 2007: 48). That dual power would represent “an alternative statehood (not only alternative)” where popular power can be expressed “as the capacity to exercise government functions in dispute with the bourgeois state”, in the struggle “between the new and the old” (Caviasca, 2011: 66). This is a clear dispute with the dominant sectors (Mazzeo & Stratta, 2007: 14). “What is essentially questioned” by popular power “is the capacity of the ruling classes to develop their hegemony over society as a whole, not only state power” (Caviasca, 2011: 25).

3 Popular Power as a Project

The idea of popular power is usually more directly associated with the idea of subject but transcends this as a project for society. Popular power builds its project as “the way of designating the foundation that shapes an ethic of liberation, that which is the support and purpose of the emancipatory project” (Mazzeo, 2006: 38), not only as the overcoming of oppression, but which “should express the anticipation of a change of era, and therefore should tend to be ‘total’ and a ‘change’ in production relations and a new world vision that would the tendency towards the universalisation of new values of the oppressed classes” (Caviasca, 2011: 19). This ethic of liberation is contrasted with the different ‘historical forms of oppression’ of the ‘system of multiple oppression’ of ‘capitalist civilisation’: economic exploitation and social exclusion; political oppression in the framework of formal democracy; sociocultural discrimination (ethnic, racial, gender, age, regional differences, among others); and ecological injustice vis-à-vis nature” (Valdés, 2001: 49). Therefore, in terms of practice and space to overcome dominations, it proposes the integration of different anti-classist, anti-patriarchal and anti-racist visions within social construction. For this reason, within “situated, our-American, decolonising, anti-racist, anti-heterosexist and anti-capitalist feminisms”, one finds both theoretical and practical contributions with great “potential for the radicalisation of the emancipatory quests embodied by social and popular movements fighting for social change” (Fabbri, 2013: 139). The “popular power” project always arises from a “horizontal intersubjectivity and from new social relations in which altruism, solidarity and cooperation prevail”. Thus, a project based on the “construction of social relations that are critical of and alternative to those of capital, is construction of popular power” (Mazzeo,

2006: 73). The project of a new social metabolism, “a construction that is both the instrument and the final objective of emancipation” (Mendez, 2020, s.f.: 11), with popular power thus the end and the means. In this way it is related with “oppressed classes’ possibilities of developing, unaided, political, social, cultural, economic and military means” (Caviasca, 2011: 25), and, in that sense, the holistic, comprehensive popular power project “refers to the exercise of power over social conditions of existence and to effective and democratic control of a metabolic social order alternative to capital” (Mazzeo, 2006: 194).

Popular power as a project involves the idea and practice of communal democracy, which is differentiated from liberal democracy in both its idea of project and its idea of subject. With regard to the project, it thus questions the tenets upon which has been built the idea of democracy in modernity. If liberal democracy has been constructed as the political form with which to defend and develop private property, the market economy and individualist values (von Mises, 1996; Laval and Dardot, 2013; García Linera, 2016), communal democracy counters with the ideas of social or communal property, a non-market economy and community values and also questions the roots of the patriarchy, structural racism or the abuse of mother nature (Bookchin, 2019; Federici, 2019; Patzi Paco, 2009; Fabbri, 2013; Zabala, 2015; Negri & Hardt, 2011). The project that proposes the idea of communal democracy can be associated with the anarchist and communist traditions of the nineteenth century but also with workers’ cooperative and trade union projects in the eighteenth century or with the union struggles or the defence of communal lands of indigenous peoples in the seventeenth century (Bookchin, 2019; Azzellini & Ness, 2017; Vargas Arenas & Sanoja Obediente, 2017). To speak of communal democracy is to speak of a way of organising society from a holistic perspective, accepting within that society the comprehensiveness of different forms of production, reproduction, revitalisation and expansion of life: administration, management, economy, culture, health education, information, communication, etc. We refer to social relations, production relations, consumer relations, distribution and management relations, etc. For this reason, communal logic conceives of democracy in a completely different way to the liberal vision, in terms of both form and content.

Direct democracy is a cornerstone of the project of popular power. Consequently, popular power, insofar as it is based on the organisation, management, selection and development of the necessary elements for the development of life, appears as the emergence of a new democratic possibility. From that perspective, the dynamics of the construction of popular power become active subjects that promote communal democracy by means of specific community practices as a possible emergence. Thus, “the agencies and nuclei of popular power are the places that offer the most possibilities to the most profound and authentic democratic action” (Mazzeo, 2006: 156). Participation is not viewed as something aesthetic, but as something that should be structural to the democratic way, such as the fact of “participating in the process of elaboration and taking of decisions and their subsequent execution, sharing responsibilities (Rauber, 2016: 33)”. Popular power “rebels against the established order and takes on the universal project of a democratic society” (Mazzeo, 2006: 49). This is why

Democracy and popular participation are structurally connected to the conception of the construction of power from below and to the aspirations of a new type of society. They are articulated from their roots, from the genesis of the new, both creating and demanding coherence between means and ends. (Rauber, 2004: 37)

For this reason, there is a need for “forms of direct democracy” by means of which to resolve everyday problems (Casas, 2007: 133). For collective decision-making and the distribution of responsibilities, it is essential to have “spaces that make possible the reflexive re-appropriation of information and the modification of practices (they cease to be self-referential, begin to become aware of the ‘other’); those spaces that become decision-making, self-managed, horizontal and therefore democratic” (Mazzeo, 2006: 175).

Moreover, en route to “developing a new type of democracy in the political, economic and cultural, in law, in morality, as the basis for the construction of a caring society”, popular power as transformative community subject for the sustenance and development of life makes “interesting contributions” (Rauber, 2008: 10). All communal nexuses¹ that propose another form of life and consequently another comprehensive form of collective management of every aspect of life are a living and constructive force for popular power. In them, they are developing another “way of shaping social life”, and they propose dynamics by means of which “a collective has and assumes the autonomous, self-determined and self-regulated capacity to decide with regard to issues associated with symbolic and material production” to guarantee biological and social life (Gutiérrez & Salazar, 2019: 23). The management of social life, production and politics form part of the “process of reproduction of existence” as a whole in which the community takes part. In opposition to the formal democracy based on the delegation of power, these communal nexuses are based on direct involvement and participation, on commitment and on “the obligation to assume the needs to satisfy, to deliberate with others with regard to how to do it, collectively to be responsible for its execution, etc. An obligation, then, to ‘collectively agree’, an obligation to generate consensus as a condition of possibility of reproduction”. From this perspective “nobody has a monopoly on decision-making and nobody delegates their capacity to produce – along with others – the decision” (Gutiérrez & Salazar, 2019: 38).

Assemblies would form a part of everyday political life, where people would participate not in accordance with their responsibilities at work, but as free people in society. Thus, assemblies “should function not only as permanent decision-making institutions but as arenas for *educating* the people in handling

¹Community networks can be understood “as a constellation of social relations of ‘compartencia’ – never harmonious or idyllic, but full of tension and contradictions – that operate in coordinated and/or cooperative fashion with more or less stability in time and with multiple objectives – always specific, always different in the sense of renewed, in other words, situated - which, in turn, tend to cover or satisfy basic needs of social and therefore individual existence. However, this form of social relations is clearly strengthened during moments of intensification of social conflict, in which actions of struggle are deployed that defy, limit or push back capitalist relations” (Gutiérrez & Salazar, 2019: 24).

complex civic and regional affairs” (Bookchin, 2019: 56). Thus, through popular power, there is a search for a democracy that “in all its forms envelops and passes through all everyday activities: from culture to politics, from the economy to education” (García Linera, 2016: 134). From this perspective, the economy should not be understood from the conventional liberal perspective of market, prices, productivity and profit, which would be “replaced by ethics, with its concern for human needs and the good life” (Bookchin, 2019: 57). With regard to forms of ownership, there is also consideration of a global process where private, state, cooperative and communal-community ownership can coexist. Community ownership is therefore seen as the key to the future, as “it arises and expands on the basis of the voluntary actions of workers, the example and experience of society” (García Linera, 2016: 135).

4 Popular Power as Subject

Popular power, as subject of communal democracy, questions the individual and individualised subject of modernity, a subject upon which has been constructed the vision of society in political, economic, social, cultural and legal spheres (Ovejero, 2017). The construction of this modern, individual subject involves the destruction of the communal subject and of the collective and communal customs, values and institutions that prevailed in many societies before and during the Middle Ages (Federici, 2010; García-Huidoro, 2020). The idea of communal democracy posits the recovery of the collective subject as basis for the organisation and development of life in society, without forgetting the importance of the individual within society (García Linera, 2016; Garcés, 2022, Laval & Dardot, 2015). The idea is to replace individualism, egoism, the struggle of all against all and personalist selfishness with communalism, solidarity, collaboration, collective care and mutual support (Iglesias Fernández, 2017). It is the specific aspect of construction of the collective self as an asset of democratic intensification that we wish to explore more thoroughly in this section. The political subject is inherently a substantial and structural part of the project, its characterisation and its development, since “there is no subject without a project through which it is constituted and expressed and, vice versa, no project without a subject that carries it” (Mendez, 2020, s.f.: 11).

In relation to the idea of popular power as subject, two important aspects to consider are the diversity of its unity and of its articulation (Stratta & Barrera, 2009; Fabbri, 2013; Valdés, 2001). The subject of popular power seeks to be heterogeneous in its constitution, as the forms of exclusion and exploitation have diversified considerably, resulting in “a diversity of subjects occupying subordinate positions in relation to different existing modalities of domination” (Fabbri, 2013: 174). Thus, from each of these margins affected and characterised by specific oppression emerge different situated and oppressed identities. However, the unitary common ground of that heterogeneity in the identity of subjects is to be found precisely in the project of emancipation via the liberating quest for the suppression of oppressions and for

the construction of a free and liberated society. The objective is a world that accommodates many worlds and where everybody is recognised and not negated: “that does not violate the pluralism of collective popular life, which is the home of possibilities that can that can be discovered, combined and organised” (Mazzeo, 2006: 47). This requires the construction of “a world that is the negation of the entire relation of capital, all the more so in a context where this relation is increasingly totalizing and contrary to processes of subjectivation” (Mazzeo, 2006: 45). Necessary forms of being “subject” and “one” at the same time are proposed, inventing new forms of identity and of collective unity. In addition, popular power sets out a specific unity of action that respects the autonomy of subjects and not rigid organic unity that negates their peculiarities. Apparent here is the idea of articulation as key concept. Not prioritising oppressions, acknowledging them all to be important and seeking formulae of mutual recognition in an emancipatory direction are a fundamental aspect. From a peripheral position, popular power should be capable of organising “a plural, multisectorial subject, a multiple social subject capable of articulating a broad group of social sectors” (Mazzeo & Stratta, 2007: 13). Taking into account “new, multiple and fragmented social actors”, there is a need for “articulations between these multiple fastening wefts and positions of subjectivity, by means of prefigurative construction” (Fabbri, 2013: 34).

The relevance of the working classes within this subject continues to be crucial: popular power is a subject of class from a dynamic point of view, but not in dogmatic, orthodox or limiting fashion, as there is increasing heterogeneity within the working classes, with exponential growth in unemployment and job insecurity (Fabbri, 2013: 176). Thus, the subject of popular growth seeks to articulate this new social morphology that includes “from the classic industrial or rural workers, shrinking in numbers, to salaried service sector employees, the swelling ranks of outsourced, subcontracted men and women” (Stratta & Barrera, 2009) and all those in insecure employment or excluded from the job market.

With regard to popular power as a collective subject in process of continuous construction, its possible forms are not defined and specified at a particular moment or in a preconceived way, but will be created and reinvented in dynamic fashion. One of the characteristics of popular power is its possible manifestation in various forms, adapting and arising from specific realities while it is modified and reconstructed in the course of the communal dynamics whence it is developed. Thus, “the ‘we’, that inherits, produces and reproduces the common can be from very different classes, can assume different forms” (Gutiérrez, 2017:122). Given the distrust of traditional politics, popular movements are a good foundation with which to generate seeds or nuclei of popular power. Traditional political parties are showing themselves to be incapable of representation, and the “emergence of social movements” reveals people’s distrust and search for social protagonism (Garcés, 2002: 10). However, not all community dynamics and counter-hegemonic social movements are popular power, so “popular power should not be confused with any struggle for demands waged by the subordinate classes” (Mazzeo, 2006: 65).

However, many of the community and popular dynamics of self-organised spaces have the potential to progress towards more advanced forms of popular power as

“agencies or nuclei of popular power” (Mazzeo, 2007). Insofar as there is an intensification of self-organisation, awareness and commitment and an increase in the capacity to dispute spaces of power, all the diverse forms within the popular movement can gradually progress from simple demands to long-term proposals of construction and dispute of power (Caviasca, 2011: 43). As advances are made in the construction of popular power, its manifestations will tend to become more organised:

They will undoubtedly acquire diverse and changing organisational forms and denominations, which will make it possible to assume and lend relative stability to experiences that point to the community re-appropriation of conditions of existence and social praxis, on an increasing scale, in a movement that will also consolidate itself as a social and political force with a power born of re-appropriation and democratic management of diverse mechanisms of social life (productive undertakings, cooperatives, management of certain public services, experiences of control and revolutionary self-management, cultural associations, etc. (Casas, 2007:142)

The construction of popular power should also incorporate another logic of spatial-temporal scales for its construction and development. Insofar as it should be developed in conflictive-constructive dialectic fashion, challenging the old and generating the new, when confronting capital, it can do so from its spatial-temporal scales, but for the construction of the new and from a perspective of long-term transformation, it is important to generate new logics. The construction of popular power obliges us to reconfigure times and scales of politics, since

The spatial-temporal scales of the common force us to learn to conceive of social transformation on the basis of another kind of notion of space and time, a notion that is both quantitative and qualitative, capable of recognising and appraising differences. They force us to learn to conceive of social transformation as a simultaneous occurrence of a multiplicity of social actions of self-determination that inhabit and produce space and time in qualitatively different fashion and in different scalar dimensions; different from one another not only in terms of size but, also and above all, in terms of their relational content. (Linsalata, 2019: 116)

From this perspective, the quantitative is important, but above all, the qualitative, in other words, “not how fast we do it, but what we do”. Therefore, importance is acquired by “the quality of the relations that we succeed in consolidating amongst ourselves” and the “possibility we have of laying siege to capital via the consolidation of our capacity to self-determine the spaces and times of our practical life” (2019: 120). For this reason, the temporal scale should be long term “precisely due to its characteristics as constituent of new social relations reproducing life (and dissolving the old ones)”, and as a long process of self-constitution of the new, popular power as “social revolution cannot be reduced to a momentary event, to a ‘victory’; rather, it encompasses an era and is formed by a series of ‘victories’ and ‘defeats’” (De Angelis, 2019: 98).

In the construction of other spatial-temporal logics of the common, the spatial dimension of popular power is vital. This space is close, wherever community inhabits new forms of life. The new power under construction should be specified and situated in a particular territory (Perdia, 2019), hence the importance of territorialising the process, of including all those material and symbolic resources, social

relations, infrastructures, collective capacities and knowledge in the construction of the new power. Thus, “popular power creates a social territoriality where the self-emancipatory capacities of the subordinate classes are expressed” (Mazzeo & Stratta, 2007: 13). Harvey recovers the concept of “heteropathy” employed by Foucault, to suggest that, from within capitalism, there may arise a “creation of heterotopic spaces, where radically different forms of production, social organisation and political power might flourish for a while, implies a *terrain of anti-capitalist possibility* that is perpetually opening and shutting down” (Harvey, 2014: 216). Here there is a fusion of the ideas of territorialisation and refiguration of popular power, specifically of local power. Thus, although a strategy of popular power should not be localist and should aspire to expanding the construction, the forms and the control of popular power to a national and even international scale, the essence of that strategy is clearly based on the nearby or local scale. On the basis of those local dynamics of popular power in neighbouring territories and spaces, in the spirit of “territorial aggregation”, should be articulated and coordinated progress towards other, larger territorial scales, reaching territorial federations and confederations (Öcalan, 2012; Rojas, 2018).

But the idea of local power, like popular power, does not have to be associated with the emancipatory cause, since there may exist both local powers and conservative or dominating dual powers, “exercised by mafias, paramilitary or diverse reactionary groups”. For this reason, apart from being counter-hegemonic and emancipatory, “local is power is not popular power unless it breaks with the hard and fast division between representatives and represented” (Coraggio, 1987: 33). Thus, there are approaches that link the idea of popular power, popular self-government, community self-organisation, local power and territorialisation of social struggles on the path to constructing situations of double power, but not from the perspective of “taking” state power, but via a parallel and complementary process of struggle against the old and emergence of the new. Local power, therefore, “should be a general, national process” where agencies of popular power begin to come into existence “with the responsibility to govern their zone” (Santucho, 1995: 37). Furthermore, the idea of defending what has been built calls for the possibility of self-defence on a local basis as necessary not only in order not to retreat, but to be able to continue advancing (Santucho, 1995; Villoro, 1997; Öcalan, 2012).

5 By Way of Conclusion

In this time of crisis of liberal democracy, exacerbated in turn by the systemic and civilising crisis, popular power appears as an emerging social process for the construction of another type of society different from the liberal model. Popular power is thus presented as a complex meta-process with a democratising capacity, in turn comprised of subprocesses that feed off one another and are developed in different spheres and with varying intensity. Thus, popular power as process, project and subject evidences its capacity to integrate and unite different practical and

theoretical approaches to overcome differences and seek renewed syntheses in the context of different emancipatory visions.

In terms of the construction of a new type of power, popular power transcends the dichotomy that pits counter-power against dual power, to integrate them into a gradual process of self-construction. It transcends the counter-position of the destituent, instituent and constituent powers to place them in dynamic relationship in a process based on a dialectic of self-constituent conflict. It transcends the idea of the reform of power and of the taking of power, via the process of construction of power itself. It also transcends the debate of state or no state, opting for work with, from and beyond the state, in other words, seeing work from the state as yet another battlefield, but always placing emphasis on the construction of the new institutionalities of the emerging popular power.

With regard to popular power as a project, via the different practices of popular power, forms, values and content are being created for a communal democracy that would transcend liberal democracy. Beyond presenting a finished model, the actual practices of direct participation, management, administration, debate, information, awareness-raising and self-organisation are prefiguring other democratic forms as present trials for the future. Thus, not only can popular power become a collective and unifying space to fight against different axes of the system of multiple dominations, but it can also constitute a space for the construction of subjects and projects for processes of emancipation, in other words, to drive a system of multiple emancipations.

With reference to the idea of subject, popular power offers very open and dynamic possibilities for the construction of a new emancipatory subject. This new subject is constructed on the basis of different situated and specific identities that arise in each different axis of domination but suggest the need and capacity to articulate and integrate the diversity of the different oppressed subjects in order to generate a new unifying emancipatory identity.

Thus, popular power as process, project and subject is based on the increase in its own capacities in the process of interaction between autonomy, self-management, self-determination, self-organisation and self-defence, which will deepen the possibility of constructing a comprehensive community government in political and productive, in social and cultural terms, as dynamic and continuous self-construction. It provides a living, collective space for the construction of alternatives in the face of different social, political and economic crises.

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Part III
Deepening Democracy, Analysing Practical
Strategies for the Participation of Basque
Society

Exploring the Right to Decide: From a Liberal Democratic Concept to a Radical Democratic Tool Approaching the Basque Case



Ander Vizán-Amorós , Julen Zabalo , and Amalur Álvarez 

Abstract Political participation in liberal democracies has often been understood as a means with limited scope and on requiring highly specific terms, but, in point of fact, it has a long tradition in territorial disputes and those relating to different legal, political and administrative systems. Its traditional legal form is the right to self-determination. Nevertheless, limitations identified in western democracies prompted a search for fresh theories, and the latter have given rise to the principle of the right to decide. It is a principle that is linked to democratic decision-making rather than to the resolution of territorial conflicts, though its development may have been seen mainly in relation to these types of issues. As we shall demonstrate, the theory relating to the right to decide has undergone a radical evolution in the Basque Country, as well as receiving contributions from a variety of social movements, often in sectors not strictly concerned with territorial disputes. In this process, the major pro-sovereignty stakeholders, particularly political parties, have doubts about the new direction being taken by the sovereignty movement, and controversy has ensued as to how to approach this concept.

Keywords Self-determination · The right to decide · *Demos* · Social movements · Basque Country

1 Introduction

The ending of the old regime, whereby monarchies were no longer considered a divine mandate, gave rise to new power scenarios, in which the emerging bourgeoisie claimed their right to choose the new forms of government and, above all, their right to participate in the political decisions of these governments. The wealth of

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discussions taking place helped form a new idea of the State: a government that is the result of the expression of popular will and shaped via elections. This provided citizens with a clear instrument for participation and, at the same time, limited them to certain participatory acts aimed at establishing the representative government.

This liberal democratic formula was unquestionably successful, as, when we speak of taking part in politics, we automatically think of the electoral process. However, when we speak only of participating, other possibilities come to mind, often implying a more active attitude on the part of citizens, particularly when it is a question of social or cultural issues.

Certainly, elections have not been the only form of political participation. This is evident from the long tradition of social movements. A product of the period of time we refer to, social movements were and are a different way of doing politics and, likewise, a differentiated expression of popular sovereignty, as stated by Tilly and Lesley (2009). These movements took off especially in the 1960s. Faced with institutionalised representation, they claimed the right to direct participation and subjectivity, starting with solving problems they considered were closer to home (v. among others, Offe, 1988; Pleyers, 2019; Santos, 1998).

With these new movements, participation in decision-making becomes just as important as achieving goals, and there is a tendency to distrust representative democracy. This distrust is based on the conviction that, over time, inertia prevents political parties and their agents from satisfactorily meeting the needs of the people and, more so, from enabling full participation in decision-making.

These positions have often led to settling for the levels closest to the individual and, to a certain extent, giving up on other levels, due to the impossibility of participating fully in them. However, on other occasions, coordination or collective work may become necessary for certain laws to be passed, for example, or for certain practices or specific policies to be exposed. In relation to these popular demands, as we shall see, the so-called right to decide makes total sense.

2 The Right to Participate and Make Decisions on Territorial Issues

The state forms of the old regime performed a limited number of functions, particularly those relating to taxation, which is why they were quite permissive in their approach to territory regarding the different peoples residing in their demarcations. However, the needs of the bourgeoisie arising in the industrialisation process that began to spread from the eighteenth century onwards called for a greater uniformity of the states, in relation to their customs as well as the training of workers.

This new scenario brought with it a movement of cultural uniformisation, in an effort to train the population, and implied a clear departure from the previous administrative and cultural permissiveness. The new emerging political form was the nation-state, that is, the state where one nation clearly predominates and imposes a

specific culture that serves as a link between all those residing in the state. There is little room for other cultures or nations, and, at best, they must remain in the background (on the nation state, v. Tivey, 1981; Guibernau, 1996).

However, just as some cultures are in danger of being overlooked, the bourgeoisie linked to these cultures too run the risk of suffering the same fate. The different nationalist movements that began to spread from the eighteenth century onwards and, particularly, during the nineteenth century were the response of many of these peoples to the cultural and financial uncertainty with which they were threatened. This became more evident in the successive pro-independence movements emerging in America, and which, within a single century, almost completely transformed the political map of America, from the creation of the United States or Haiti to the independence of Cuba.

All of these cases involved revolts against the mother countries, through armed conflict, with varying degrees of intensity. Nonetheless, from the nineteenth century onwards, there was increased interest in alternatives ensuring a democratic and participatory approach for catering to territorial problems, thus leading to the formulation of the right to self-determination. Its initial direction had two reference points of totally different ideological persuasion: on the one hand, European socialist tradition, and, on the other, North American liberal democracy.

Socialist thinking of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had to contend necessarily with the territorial problems of the great empires still existing in Europe. In the case of the Austro-Hungarian empire, particularly noteworthy is one of its most striking proposals for dealing with its enormous national diversity, put forward by the so-called Austro-Marxist socialist movement, including Karl Renner and, particularly, Otto Bauer. The latter's proposal eschews territorial solutions and focuses on the possibility of a specified number of members of a given culture organising themselves with a certain degree of autonomy, anywhere in the empire, without a designated space being allotted to each of the existing nations. This 'personal' non-territorial solution did not allow for the option of seceding, as it was circumvented by allowing the possibility to set up a self-governing entity anywhere within the Austro-Hungarian territory (Bauer, 2000; Nimni, 2005, 2007; Renner, 2005).

The possibility of territorial separation was, in contrast, contemplated by Lenin, and this is reflected in the Soviet constitution of 1924. Although Lenin held different views on socialism's stance in relation to national movements, he eventually recognised their legitimacy. Hence, the need to incorporate the national question into the socialist struggle without a preliminary selection of the national movements of interest to the strategic goals of socialism as all popular national movements deserved the respect of socialism (Villanueva, 1987).

Liberal thinking too was obliged to tackle the issue and offer solutions. Particularly striking is American president Woodrow Wilson's proposal to solve the territorial problem in the Austro-Hungarian empire, following its defeat in the First World War. He also defended a territorial solution: grounded on what he called the *principle of nationalities*, it entailed recognising a territory for each of the different nations making up the fallen empire. Despite the obvious problems arising from the enormous mix of nations in different spaces, new states were founded. In some of

these cases, a new tool, until then rarely used, was drawn upon, namely, plebiscites or popular consultations on the suitability of creating new states.

As pointed out by Orentlicher (2003: 20–25), this first stage of the right to self-determination, marked by the principle of nationalities, helped form or restructure a variety of states. However, it was highly localised in Central and Eastern Europe and limited to the period between the two world wars, with no intention of becoming universal. This was followed by a second, more widespread, stage corresponding to the decolonisation process. Theoretically, following the Second World War, it went from being a guiding principle to becoming a right recognised by the United Nations. This brought about a radical change in the world map of states, with numerous new states emerging, mainly in Asia and Africa. Although they were not spared armed conflict, they differed from the previous decolonising processes in that they were created as a result of some form of agreement, on many occasions following plebiscites.

However, this right reflected in the United Nations Charter likewise failed to become universal, as it was clearly intended to be restricted to the official colonies of the main European mother countries. Thus, a third stage opened up, aimed at achieving the universal realisation of the right to self-determination as an inalienable right at the end of the twentieth century. We shall now take a closer look at this stage.

3 Theories on Types of Self-Determination

When referring to the right to self-determination, we cannot use the singular and speak of just one theory encompassing and developing said right. On the contrary, we need to refer to theories of self-determination, in the plural, which could number as many as the authors developing this right. Below we shall try to give a brief overview of some of them, considering that “all of these theories should not be interpreted as if they were totally different from each other. Certainly, there are substantial differences between them, but there are also similarities” (Beobide, 2008: 69; our translation).

For our own classification, we take as our main basis the one developed by Requejo and Nagel (2017), with modifications based on the theories of Buchanan and Norman. The theories of self-determination are summed up under four types:

- Nationalist theories: with the nation as a central element, they understand the former as a legitimate political subject with the right to self-determination. Thus, a pre-existing political unit confers legitimacy on secession (Requejo & Nagel, 2017).
- Remedial theories: just-cause theories see secession as a political solution to be avoided, except in extreme conditions. Buchanan (1991) gives a detailed list of the causes for which secession is justifiable: cases of injustice or oppression with respect to social groups in the shape of infringements of human rights or discriminatory policies.

- Procedural theories: they are usually classified within remedial theories (Requejo & Nagel, 2017), given that secession is understood as a last resort, even going so far as to recommend proceduralisation as a means to hinder secession, though combining it with a guarantee “the State is united by consensus, and not only by force” (Norman, 2002: 95; our translation). These theories lay down that secession must be the consequence of a rational process within a fair and democratic constitutional framework (Norman, 2002).
- Plebiscitary theories: also called democratic theories, of free choice, freedom of association or individual consent (Beobide, 2008). We are particularly interested in them because they emphasise the radicalisation or intensification of democracy and, in addition, because they serve as a basis for framing the concept of the right to decide. Let us expand further on them.

Plebiscitary theories are generally more tolerant as regards secession and focus on the democratic exercise of the process of self-determination. This tolerance can go so far as to accept secession, despite it not being the most desirable option in certain aspects (Beran, 1984).

The legitimacy of secession lies, in this case, in the democratisation of the separation process, individual autonomy and the right to voluntary political association being key (Requejo, 2002). Plebiscitary theories concur that self-determination affects individual rights and not collective rights (Gauthier, 1994; Philpott, 1995; Requejo, 2002). In this respect, self-determination marks the peak in the pursuit of the emancipation of the individual (Requejo, 2002). Nonetheless, though it is considered an individual right, self-determination is exercised in groups (Philpott, 1995); for this reason, at the heart of the process of self-determination is the plebiscite, namely, a consultation or referendum, in which the population exercising the right to self-determination gets to decide on its legal and political status.

These theories likewise concur that self-determination is a fully democratic exercise. On the other hand, they differ as to which territories are potential holders of this right. It is broadly held that groups of individuals with a clearly defined territory and the will to associate themselves can exercise the right to self-determination – although Philpott (1995), for example, states that ethnicity cannot be considered criteria for identifying these territories – considering that the new State to be created should be efficient and capable of taking on the basic competencies of a State (Philpott, 1995; Beran, 1984; Wellman, 1995). However, the conditions do not include the requirement of the existence of extreme threat (in which case the application of the right to self-determination as a last resort or just cause is almost consensual).

4 The Right to Decide: Closing the Loop

Continuing our search for participation at territorial levels, we have focused on plebiscitary theories of self-determination, given that they see the latter as a democratic process. It could be said that the theoretical basis of the concept of the right

to decide derives from the development of the right to self-determination, a step further on our journey. What is considered the right to decide? Where and why does it arise? What relation does it have with the theories of self-determination?

As we have already pointed out, the theoretical hurdle for different nationalist movements implied by the practical limitation of the right to self-determination to the colonial context and to the legal framework put forward by the United Nations lies in the origin of the concept of self-determination (Cassese, 1995; López-Jacoiste Díaz, 2019; Urrutia et al., 2012). We speak of a theoretical hurdle, as there are numerous examples in practice that refute the same, though they are always linked to conflictive emergency settings with an international impact. A first example can be found in Bangladesh, separated from Pakistan in 1971, and there are many others following the end of the Cold War: the reunification of Germany, the splitting of former Czechoslovakia into two states, the founding of new states as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union (the Baltic countries, the Caucasus and Asian Republics) and of Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, etc.). Beyond Europe too we have the case of the secession of Eritrea from Ethiopia in 1993.

In fact, the number of new states set up outside the context of decolonisation is far from few. Despite this being the case, it has failed to lead to a review of the legal situation internationally, though it has helped increase the doubts already raised regarding the pertinence of the right to self-determination being linked exclusively to decolonising processes. Indeed, since the end of the twentieth century, there have been numerous attempts to theorise on and carry out processes of emancipation not linked to decolonisation nor necessarily to emergency situations. What's more, there have been theories suggesting that "even without using the right to self-determination, a process of secession can be carried through, on the grounds of democratic principle" (Urrutia et al., 2012: 64; our translation). Kosovo and Canada are examples in this respect.

The most well-known case of secession not based on the right to self-determination is Kosovo, in 2008. In the absence of an agreement with the mother state, it was set up as a state following a unilateral declaration of independence by the Kosovan Parliament. What is relevant in this case is that the International Court of Justice concluded that the international declaration of independence was not in contravention of international law, precisely because there is no specific legislation on this question (Advisory Opinion delivered on 22 July 2010, 56th paragraph). It is clear that the long conflict in the former Yugoslavia had a direct impact on its continued independence, and, on the other hand, it illustrated the importance of recognition by the international community which, though it may not have been unanimous, support came from numerous countries around the world (Urrutia Libarona, 2012).

We can draw this same conclusion from studying the pro-sovereignty process in Quebec, a turning point in how the right to self-determination was perceived in the latter part of the twentieth century. Two referenda were held in Quebec about its separation from Canada, in 1980 and 1995, both with an adverse outcome for the secessionists (by just one point in the second consultation). However, what is relevant about this experience for the theories of self-determination is the endeavour to solve territorial problems democratically. It triggered an intense academic debate on

politics and the law (see, e.g. Moore, 1998; Macedo and Buchanan, 2003), including on the ruling by Canada's Supreme Court in 1998 on the secession of Quebec and the subsequent Clarity Act, in 2000 (see Buchanan, 2003). It was concluded that it was essential that a process of separation always be agreed between the Federal Government and the Government of the Province wishing to separate. Moreover, it was likewise agreed that a unilateral process could be considered valid if the international community was in agreement.

These long and interesting debates on the conflict between Quebec and Canada also gave birth to a key idea: the need to be able to accommodate in the best possible way the interests of the population, including their territorial demands, and all of it within a democratic framework, and based on a democratic consultation. The Scottish case provides us with an example. The British government, through the *Edinburgh Agreement*, acknowledges the Scottish people's right to decide via a referendum if they wish to go on being part of the United Kingdom, taking the *Act of Union between Scotland and England* of 1707 as a basis (v. among others, Keating, 2015).

Another different case, in contrast, is that of Catalonia, where the right to decide has resulted in a series of unsuccessful attempts on the part of the Catalan authorities to renew and readapt their statute of autonomy. The refusal of Spanish political parties and, in particular, the Spanish Constitutional Court to negotiate the proposals put forward by Catalan authorities prompted a search for new ways. Foremost among these is the very interesting development of the theory of the right to decide, closely linked, as we shall see, to the Catalan pro-sovereignty experience (Vilajosana, 2014).

However, one of the first places to make use of this concept, as one comparable to the right to self-determination, was the Basque Country (López, 2013a). Under the influence of the newly created states in Europe following the reunification of Germany in 1989, and clearly aided by the Irish peace process, in the last decade of the twentieth century, it was considered the right time among the different sectors of Basque nationalism to jointly seek new solutions to the Basque problem. This culminated in the agreement for joint action, called the *Lizarra-Garazi Agreement*, reached by the main cultural, socio-economic and political actors in the Basque Country in 1998.

This context favoured the exploration of new formulas for emancipation inextricably linked to the democratic principle which could help overcome the obstacle implied by international jurisprudence. Therefore, renewed efforts were made to theorise on the right to self-determination, either as a democratic or political process for change (Zubiaga, 1999), or to propound channels and instruments for it to be developed democratically (Zubiaga, 2002). All these contributions provided the basis for the initiative to reform the Political Statute of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (the community made up of the three western territories in the Basque Country, traditionally with a Basque nationalist majority), presented by the then president Juan Jose Ibarretxe, and approved by the Basque Parliament in 2004. Although it had little success in overcoming the institutional hurdles (it was immediately blocked in the Spanish Parliament), its theoretical principles were used

as the basis for a subsequent proposal for a statute in Catalonia and, in particular, for enriching its theory (as well as practice) in what would subsequently become known as the *procés de Catalunya*.

What Elements Define the Right to Decide?

One of the first questions that arise when speaking of the right to decide is its relation with the right to self-determination. We can appreciate different views: there are those who see it as a right to “decide (or not) on secession” (Zubiaga, 2014); those who see in the new concept an “evolution in strategy and discourse” (Vilaregut, 2011); or those who see it as a new political category, a “neologism” (López, 2013b; Ridaó, 2014), widening the differences with respect to the theories of self-determination. Even so, all the interpretations have something in common: what is most important is the democratic legitimisation of the process (Urrutia et al., 2012), as they are all based on the principle of democratic radicalism (López, 2011).

Thus, the right to decide would not be merely a pro-independence or secessionist demand, but rather one linked to a specific conception of democracy. It arises in democratic contexts and aims at being a formula for meeting all demands emerging in the political sphere, based on democracy’s potential for the same, including the demand for independence (Vilajosana, 2015). In this way, it is obvious that the right to decide is conceptually tied to the right to self-determination, to theories of secession and to minority rights (López, 2015). Let us further examine these ties.

As for the relation between the right to decide and the right to self-determination, Lopez points out (2015) that the right to decide offers peoples a way to manage the conflicts for their liberation within the framework of the rules of the game of democracy, as it includes two basic ideas: the fulfilment of a people’s wish for freedom – recognised by the right to self-determination – and the exercise of said will using democratic means. To a certain extent, we could say that the right to decide democratises the right to self-determination.

In respect of its connection to secession (López, 2015), the right to decide creates a close relation between secession and democracy, that is, a new legal approach based on the plebiscitary theories of secession. Therefore, secession is justified on the grounds of individual freedom, on the voluntary decision by individuals who make up a political community. The right to decide thus legitimises secession as an extension of the democratic principle, a principle that must be at the core of all political decisions and of all decisions relating to territorial limits.

Thirdly, regarding the relation with minority rights, the right to decide comes into play in the presence of inequality, that is, unequal treatment by the State of a part of its territory. Rather than seeking privileged treatment, the right to decide aims at reaching a democratic solution while taking into account the differences and circumstances of the sub-state territories. The objective is to rebuild the institutional structure in pursuit of a level playing field. In this case, the situation of inequality or discrimination is not a result of cultural or linguistic conditions, but rather as a consequence of the clash of democratic wills (López, 2015).

With the aim of defining the right to decide, we must point out three main characteristics. In the first place, it is a radical expression of the democratic principle. In

other words, it defends the right to be able to decide without limitation on any desired issue, including such fundamental questions as the institutional structure (López, 2011). In the second place, as far as the subject is concerned, it is a right which is held by the *demos*, namely, a community located in a specific territory and democratically organised. Although it is an individual right, it is a right that is exercised collectively (Barceló i Serramalera, 2015).

In the third and last place, it is a right that is exercised in two stages. A first stage is aimed at knowing the will of the *demos*, what we would call the expression stage, and it implies the capacity to express the will of a specific community. The most common tool for implementing this stage is a referendum or non-binding consultation. At a second stage, the right to decide involves guaranteeing the fulfilment of the will expressed, what we would call the fulfilment stage. This is the stage when the right to decide makes sense as an autonomous right, and it is precisely when the real substance of the right is developed (Barceló i Serramalera, 2015). This second stage for actually carrying out the will expressed by the people would be done following a process of negotiation by both parties (Corretja, 2016).

The Right to Decide as a Tool of Radical Democracy

The right to decide has evolved as a radical democratic tool, which can be used in very different settings and moments. From the legal point of view, it is therefore inevitable that the concept of sovereignty be reconceptualised, at least in three respects. On the one hand, there needs to be a constituent power that understands sovereignty in a dynamic and non-dogmatic fashion. We are referring to an institutionalised constituent power which, together with the rule of law, contemplates the freedom of public opinion and the principle of participation (Arendt, 1990), in contrast with an absolute power, or non-institutionalised one, which can only be changed through great revolutions that inevitably entail a continuous of total breaks. The legal framework must necessarily reflect a continuous flow of ideas and claims between the constituent assemblies, institutional authorities and society (Pisarello, 2014).

On the other hand, it is also important to understand sovereignty not as a single power that implies binding and perpetual unity, but rather as a practical power that can be exercised in multiple stages and by diverse subjects. If we understand the constituent power as an open and dynamic power, we must understand that this implies questioning its existence as something inextinguishable. In other words, there is an opportunity for the legitimacy of the constituent subject to be questioned and a new one to emerge in any specific political community. The theories of pluri-national federalism provide us with a way to tailor these new realities by questioning the idea of a single *demos* and legitimising the coordination between multiple nations and even legitimising the emergence of a new constituent power (Maiz, 2008).

Lastly, in order to understand a conception of the right to decide as a radical democratic tool, it is essential to keep in mind how the concept of sovereignty, together with the concept of territory, is developed in feminist theories. Feminism lays down the need to rethink sovereignty or the right to self-determination by putting life at the centre. In other words, sovereignty is understood as the capacity to

make decisions about our lives, about the lives we wish to live and about the resources we need for the same – sexuality, identity, care, the economy, etc. – and to organise sovereignty based on the socialisation of the control of these resources (Verge Maestre, 2018). Thus, sovereignty is not only understood as linked to territory, but, by putting life at the centre, feminism speaks of a sovereignty that includes the body itself, as well as the capacity to make decisions about ourselves (Gabriel Sabaté, 2018).

In this respect, and as we shall analyse below, the right to decide has the potential to be an instrument to respond to multiple needs and issues that may arise in a given territory and, at the same time, to be a tool for dialogue between different movements with the same emancipatory and democratic values.

5 The Right to Decide and Its Use by Social Movements: Experiences in the Basque Country

We have seen how a concept, arising from the liberal interpretations of the plebiscitary theories of self-determination, evolved to end up taking on the features of what we have called democratic radicalism. It is an evolution that has aroused great interest in the Basque Country, from the point of view of Basque nationalism, as well as from that of diverse social movements, particularly interested in furthering democratic participation. Let us see in what terms the Basque movement for the right to decide is currently operating.

To this end, we must inevitably speak of the *Gure Esku* movement (originally, *Gure Esku Dago*; It's in our hands) (cf. Scensei and Columbia University, 2015). Set up in 2013, it is the citizens' movement that has designed and developed the practice of the right to decide in the Basque Country. Its aim is to determine the political future in the territories of the Basque Country in a free and democratic way via a referendum. For that purpose, it has developed numerous initiatives, all of which are focused on the participation and empowerment of citizens, based on democratic and pacific values.

Two stages can be appreciated in its short history, and defining them will help provide us with a clear picture of the conceptual evolution of this right, as described earlier in the section on theory.

Gure Esku: Its Beginnings and Its Alliance with Social Movements

The three principles held as its starting point by this citizens' movement at its inception were as follows: "We are a people; we have the right to decide and now is the time for citizens".¹ During the course of its existence, as we shall see, these principles have been developed, broadened and reconceptualised.

¹Gure Esku was presented in Irun on 8 June 2013. The three principles on which the movement was to be based were mentioned here:

<https://gara.naiz.eus/paperezkoa/20130609/407185/es/Gure-Esku-Dago-relanza-demanda-derecho-decidir?Hizk=en>

To begin with, for Gure Esku, the concept of the right to decide was linked exclusively to the solution of a territorial conflict, although there were some innovations. Among them, of note was the ambiguous use of the concept *people*, and the avoidance of the term nation, clearly associated with nationalism. However, even more important, and connecting with new political stances at the time, this *people* is subdivided into three *demoi*, three territorial communities, each of which has the capacity to decide.

In other words, the Basque Country is divided into three democratic communities with their own institutions (Basque Autonomous Community, Foral Community of Navarre and Agglomeration Community of the Basque Country), and each one of them has the right to decide within its own framework. Thus, we can speak of a people with three *demoi* whose decision-making capacity is recognised; three *demoi*, a people and a focal point which is “citizenry”. The citizens of each one of the *demoi* are the ones who will have to exercise their capacity to decide.

Nevertheless, in the course of its evolution, and the strengthening of the right to decide, Gure Esku has benefited from contributions of other social movements which have helped put flesh on the discourse, as they have helped to include some form of decision-making in it. For instance, the feminist movement claims women’s right to make decisions about their own bodies; trade unions claim greater decision-making capacity with respect to their socio-economic conditions; the environmental movement defends the right to make decisions on waste management (among other questions), etc. The issues susceptible to joint decision-making by the citizenry grow in number, and there is a certain distancing from the almost exclusive connection with territory, upheld so far.

This broadening of concepts became evident in Gure Esku in 2017. This can be appreciated in a document published that same year, “Herritarron Ituna – Citizens’ pact”, and in the following years with different initiatives along these lines. The last of these was the so-called “Hamaika Gara” (we’re a multitude), in 2020, where these ideas were repeated as can be appreciated in its declaration: “We have the right to decide on questions affecting our lives and our community” (our translation).

However, in this case, it was not just an isolated initiative organised by Gure Esku. It was supported by diverse movements and actors who had a similar outlook, namely, that the citizenry or political community should be given the necessary tools in order to make a decision about such questions as affect them, and the right to decide is one of them. Thus, the right to decide is understood as a way to exercise sovereignty: as a tool for the emancipation of both the individual and the group. Below are some examples.

Among them, we would highlight the theory and practice of the Basque Country’s feminist movement. From this perspective, *Bilgune Feminista*² develops the concepts

²Euskal Herriko Bilgune Feminista (Feminist Meeting Point of the Basque Country) is a Basque feminist organisation. Set up in 2002 and close to the Basque nationalist left, it has developed exponentially since then and is currently one of the most influential social stakeholders in the Basque Country. The V Feminist Symposium of the Basque Country was held in November 2019, at which Bilgune Feminista presented the paper to which we have referred herein: http://bilgune-feminista.eus/uploads/erab_1/2020/06/1593000091-PONENTZIAK-cas.pdf

of sovereignty – understood as the capacity for decision-making –, territory and citizenry. With respect to sovereignty, it states that:

Feminist sovereignty has the capacity to decide about the life we wish to live and to have control over what we need for the same; socializing control over production and reproduction and organising sovereign from there. (our translation)

Thus, sovereignty is understood as both an individual and collective process, not only rooted in a territory but rather:

It does not refer solely to the territory because it is a sovereignty that includes our bodies, what we are saying is that we are controllers of our own lives. Being sovereign is being in charge of our bodies and our emotional and sexual relations, paving the way to being healthy, having the capacity to decide for ourselves. (our translation)

We can speak of citizenry in the same way, although putting the needs and care of people at the centre of its obligations and rights, giving priority to the latter above the needs of the markets.

Similar statements are made in other spheres too. The LGTBI+ movement understands sovereignty as freedom and the capacity to decide on sexual identity and gender. The movement in favour of the Basque language claims the right for a democratic administration in a multilingual situation to be able to contemplate, recognise and guarantee the linguistic rights of the individual and the group.³

A close look at another, currently active, major movement, the old age pensioners movement, reveals that the idea to put the socio-economic system of life and its care at the centre and not capital is behind the demands and numerous debates on the public pension system, the laws on dependence and on loneliness and care for the elderly (Fernandez San Martin, 2020). It is assumed that there is a need for a society based on mutual care as a limit of individual sovereignty and there is a demand for a sovereignty that strengthens reciprocity.⁴

The environmental movement has likewise adopted the concept of the right to decide. A recent example is the public reaction to the construction of the waste incineration plant in Zubieta (San Sebastian), with people calling for the “right to decide on waste management”. In this respect, the platform Erraustegia Erabakia⁵ held popular consultations on 23 October 2016 in order to come to a decision about the building of this incineration plant in the towns affected.

³For the LGTBI+ movement in the Basque Country, view <https://intifadamarika.noblogs.org/harro/> and for the important and influential movement in favour of the Basque language: <https://kontseilua.eus/>

⁴The Basque Old Age Pensioners movement is a recent phenomenon (they began to assemble in 2018), but it has proved an unexpected success. They assemble on a weekly basis in the main cities of the Basque Country, with an aim, at first, to claim a decent pension. However, over time, their thinking has developed, and they have broadened their demands. For more information on this movement, consult: Fernandez San Martin, Jon (2020).

⁵For information on Erraustegia Erabakia, see: <https://erraustegiaerabakia.wordpress.com/>

Last of all, we would mention the demonstrations organised by the Charter of Social Rights of the Basque Country,⁶ a platform agglutinating many of the above-mentioned movements. The platform held a general strike in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country and the Foral Community of Navarre on 30 January 2020 and called for “the right of the workers of the Basque Country to decide on the best way to guarantee the public pension system and decent pensions” and the “right to decide our own model of industrial relations as well as our own collective bargaining framework without interference of any kind” (our translation). Moreover, in the context of the health crisis resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, the same platform was responsible for a demonstration held in June 2020 and called *Life first*, in which they stated “we want to be in control of our decisions for sustaining lives and make the decisions here...” (our translation).

All these movements have something in common, they claim the right to be able to decide directly about issues which current political practice reserves for legal, democratic representative bodies. They all think that the right to decide can be an excellent democratic tool for channelling different problems and demands. In other words, they go beyond the liberal democratic theory of the right to self-determination as a tool for channelling territorial problems, helping it develop into a much broader radical democratic theory, as a useful tool for solving very different problems.

The Right to Decide and the Basque Political Parties

This new theory obliges those who, so far, have been considered the main players in this field, namely, political parties (as democratic representatives of the will of the people, expressed in the different electoral cycles), to reconsider their role and representativity. We can appreciate a variety of stances.⁷

At the heart of the approach of the Basque Nationalist party, EAJ-PNV (Christian Democrat, the main party in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country) is the conviction that there is a differentiated Basque national identity. Furthermore,

⁶The Charter of Social Rights of the Basque Country was set up on 31 May 2014, following a process of debate, and promoted by different social and trade union stakeholders in the Basque Country. For information on the same, view: <http://eskubidesozialenkarta.com/es/eskubide-sozialen-karta/>

⁷The positions of the PNV, EH Bildu and Elkarrekin Podemos are those they defend in their programmes for the elections to the Basque Parliament in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country in July 2020. Geroa Bai's position corresponds to its electoral programme for the Autonomous Community elections of May 2019. And EH Bai's stance is that contained in the presentation of its general project.

Links viewed, 10 October 2020:

PNV: <https://www.eaj-pnv.eus/es/adjuntos-documentos/19724/pdf/programa-electoral-elecciones-al-parlamento-vasco->

EH Bildu: https://www.egitekoprest.eus/img/dokumentuak/programa_electoral_web.pdf

Elkarrekin Podemos: https://www.rtve.es/contenidos/documentos/elecciones_vascas_2020/programa_electoral_elkarrekin_podemos.pdf

Geroa Bai: [https://www.geroabai.com/files/2019/05/PROGRAMA-PARLAMENTO-2019%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.geroabai.com/files/2019/05/PROGRAMA-PARLAMENTO-2019%20(1).pdf)

EH Bai: <http://www.ehbai.eus/gure-proiektua/?lang=eu>

it has traditionally linked these national demands to the historical rights of the Basque people and considers that this “manifests itself through the citizenry’s right to decide expressed in a free and democratic way” (p. 423). At all times it refers only to the territorial issue and reminds the Spanish state of its obligation to respect what Basque citizens may have decided.

EH Bildu (a coalition of left-wing Basque nationalist parties, the second largest force in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country and the fourth in the Foral Community of Navarre) also claims the existence of a Basque nation and proposes a solution for the Spanish “territorial conflict”, based on the premise that “Basque citizens and their institutions are the only subjects who can define the future of Basque citizens” (p. 148; our translation). However, we can appreciate a broadening of this territorial approach in the assertion that sovereignty “is not only linked to the nature of the Basque nation but also to the will to guarantee and develop the welfare of the citizens living in Basque territories” (p. 146; our translation). EH Bildu endorses the growing demand for the right to participate and decide: “increasingly more citizens want to take the floor and decide on the issues that have a direct impact on their life. There is a growing number of social and political stakeholders who demand new channels for expressing their opinions and for decision-making” (p. 151). To this end, it is necessary to be able to make decisions in different spheres, not only as regards territory: making decisions on the economic model, on our body, etc. In short, “the right to decide everything” (p. 149; our translation).

Elkarrekin Podemos (a Spanish left-wing party, the fourth largest force in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country and the fifth in the Foral Community of Navarre) does not speak of a Basque nation but does refer to the plurality of Basque society and recognises the existence of a territorial problem. Though always in association with the territorial aspect, it defends “the need to address the recognition of Basque citizenry’s right to decide” (p. 206).

Geroa Bai (a coalition of centrist parties in Navarre, including the EAJ-PNV; the third largest electoral force in Navarre) does not speak of a Basque nation either, although it does refer to Navarre’s specific character, considering it a political subject, and trusts in Navarre’s citizens’ power of decision to decide their political future, within the Spanish state.

Euskal Herria Bai (EH Bai, a coalition of left-wing Basque nationalist parties in the Agglomeration Community of the Basque Country; the third most important force in the French legislative elections in 2017) defends a Basque nation, although it understands the current diversity in identity and calls for an independent Basque Country. To this end, the Basque people should be given the right to decide their social, cultural, economic and political future.

As we can appreciate, political parties place the right to decide within the territorial dispute of the Basque Country, whereas some social movements, as well as Gure Esku, have broadened the term and speak of a variety of areas of sovereignty. This may have helped win over new supporters for the territorial claim, from social movements not overly interested in this issue. However, extending sovereignty to other areas may, on the one hand, water down the territorial claim and, on the other,

cause some support to be lost in pro-sovereignty sectors, less keen on exceeding the territorial scope.

We are therefore faced with two lines of thought within the current Basque pro-sovereignty movement. The traditional one limits the right to decide to the territorial sphere and is supported by the EAJ-PNV. On the other hand, the perspective developed by social movements and Gure Esku understands the right to decide as a tool for solving the Basque territorial problem as well as numerous other problems, always on the basis of political participation, deliberation and consultation. This vision is supported by EH Bildu (who combines it with the traditional vision) and by Elkarrekin Podemos.

It could be said that the debate confronts the concept of sovereignty with that of sovereignties and the territory concept with that of territories (in the broadest sense). It is evident that social movements and some left-wing political parties defend the latter concept of sovereignty in the plural (energy, food, feminism and also territory), whereas other parties maintain a more historical conception of the right to decide, comparable to what we have seen as plebiscitary self-determination.

According to the traditional conception, the Basque sovereignty process has been understood as a unique process, guided in the main by the national question and boosted by Basque nationalist political parties. With the new proposals put forward by social movements which we have studied, the aim is to build a sovereign process that includes sovereignty or sovereignties and the subjects that exercise the same in a variety of areas while understanding the multiple needs for emancipation overlapping each other and, at the same time, building a sovereignty process from the bottom up.

The contrast between both lines of thought gives rise to many doubts and much debate on core concepts in political theory such as democracy, sovereignty, the demos or territory.

6 Conclusions

In this chapter we have seen how the ways of understanding political participation vary depending on the time in history and the theoretical and ideological point of view. In order to govern institutions, liberal democracy places the emphasis on representativeness, that is, on the fact that, on a periodic basis, by means of elections, citizens choose their desired representatives for government. This predominant option has not, however, been the only one, as other more direct forms of government and, above all, forms of decision-making have been pursued by the so-called social movements.

From the moment that political territories were understood to not be royal property but rather people's property, the decision on territorial disputes too began to evolve, and it is on this that we have focused in this work. Progressing from wars or violent positions in order to take ownership of, or lay claim to, a territory, from the twentieth century onwards, democratic formulas for consulting the citizenry began

to be used. The former were subsequently assimilated into the right to self-determination by the international community. However, it is a right that imposes stringent requirements for non-colonial cases and one which does not work for other claims.

It is precisely in relation to these cases, where it was not possible to legally appeal to the right to self-determination, that other formulas for solving certain territorial disputes began to come into play. With its origins in plebiscitary theories, and a result of the development of the concept of democracy, the right to decide began to emerge in the twenty-first century. We have defined it as a new concept, linked to political participation and democracy, and not just another plebiscitary theory on the right to self-determination.

This new theory has been closely monitored in the Basque Country, particularly with regard to the Catalan case. Just as in Catalonia, the right to decide has evolved, and it is clearly reflected in the new path taken by the Gure Esku movement, along with other social movements: the right to decide is not just a new liberal democratic tool for solving territorial problems, seeing as certain sectors of nationalist movements (at least, those more closely linked to the left and social movements) use it as a new radical democratic procedure for solving numerous problems.

This new conception breaks with former models, and this inevitably raises many doubts, particularly among those who, so far, have been the major stakeholders in the Basque sovereignty process, namely, the political parties, but also among those supporting the right to decide for the Basque Country. These doubts, together with the consequent disputes, can be summed up in four great questions, some of which date from time immemorial:

- The concept of democratic participation, that is, the clash between a conception of representative democracy, internationally approved, and a more radical conception, which defends participation for deciding on issues in multiple spheres of our lives.
- The concept of democracy, as an option for exercising power over a given spatial framework at state level or extended to smaller frameworks, such as, our bodies, food, etc.
- The concept of territory, with different levels of dispute. From a single, indivisible national territory (the seven Basque historical territories), to three territories with self-governing administrative demarcations and with the power to decide on them, to territories at local level, or even understood in a more diffuse way, not linked to a specific spatial framework.
- The holder of the right to decide. We mention it last because it is where there seems to be greatest consensus, at least, as regards the more classical concept of territoriality: three *demoi* can be differentiated, one for each administrative space, the citizenry of each one of these demarcations being considered the subject holding the right. However, when we speak of the subject, let us not forget the fact that diverse social movements have been reconceptualising territory.

Undoubtedly, a new conception of the right to decide in the Basque Country will arise from these disputes.

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Exploring New Citizenship Practices: The Meaning of Young Activists' Political Engagement in the Basque Country



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Abstract The article analyses the meaning of innovative activist practices carried out by politicised young people in the Basque Country while considering the lines of continuity and rupture of said practices with respect to the political tradition in which these young people were socialised. To this end, we have referred to the results of qualitative research carried out with the aid of in-depth interviews during 2018. The analysis demonstrates that young activists are gradually moving away from intermediation by institutionalised political actors who have, so far, led political opposition in the Basque Country and proposes new, less formal, ways of relating to politics. More specifically, they are shifting political participation to areas of daily life, thus broadening the meaning of politics and redesigning the limits of the political arena. Their practices are understood as acts carried out by activist citizens who transform diverse social spaces into citizenship building sites. The transformation of young participants into activist citizens is underpinned by the existence of a particular structure for political opportunity in the Basque political field: a long-standing culture of community politics, characterised by counter-hegemonic activism and linked to nation building projects, in which they are socialised at an early age. Nonetheless, the new generations of activists tailor the acquired dispositions in this politicised context to the current conditions of individualisation and distancing from institutions, typical of the second modernity.

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1 Introduction

Studies on the political participation of young people in recent years coincide in identifying a series of trends common to Western youth. On the one hand, there have been changes in the young people's forms of political participation, having become more diverse, fragmented and sporadic, as youth transitions are prolonged and lose linearity. On the other hand, the processes of individualisation and deinstitutionalisation taking over the political field bring with them greater disconnection with political institutional actors and, generally speaking, a distancing from the political system on the part of new generations. The Basque Country, a European region located between Spain and France, with a strong cultural and political identity, is no exception to these general trends. The report "Portraits of Youth" drawn up in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country by the Basque government on a yearly basis provides meaningful data on the attitudes to politics of the youth in this region in 2020: only 29% of young people between the ages of 18 and 29 are very interested or quite interested in politics, 71% do not consider themselves close to any political party, and, of all institutions, political parties are the ones that inspire less trust (Observatorio Vasco de la Juventud, 2020).

On the other hand, Basque politics also features a series of particularities with respect to European democratic societies. Certainly, the Basque socio-political field has undergone some of the general changes occurring in Spain and Europe in recent years but also other specific transformations deriving from the disappearance of the armed organisation ETA, the end of political violence and the gradual normalisation of the democratic system. This implied a restructuring of the overall political field in the Basque Country and of society itself in this new situation. In particular, it implied a reorganisation of the Basque nationalist left-wing forces close to ETA. Since Franco's dictatorship, these organisations had been generating culture and participatory practices which are deeply rooted in large sectors of society and are characterised by a form of activism which is counter-hegemonic and has a tendency to undermine the established order.

These left-wing forces are currently reformulating their discourses and political practices and are becoming more and more institutionalised and integrated in political infrastructure. At the same time, Basque society is still a relatively politicised society as a result of the ongoing national conflict. It has intense community life linked to nation building and state building projects, and a long tradition in self-organisation, a legacy of Franco's dictatorship and upheld over the last few decades. Modernity and tradition merge in Basque reality, a socially and economically

developed society, yet maintaining a legacy of community life and collective cooperation, reinforced by the abovementioned political projects (Zelik, 2017). Historically, this capacity for self-organization and vindication has led to important social innovations at the grassroots level. In the cultural sphere, we can mention the foundation of *ikastolas* or schools in the Basque language and the creation of the standard Basque. In the socioeconomic field, the establishment of a network of cooperative companies has been relevant (Heales, Hodgson & Rich, 2017). Regarding other social issues, it is also a society open to change and innovation; for example, it is at the forefront of European public policies on gender equality, thanks to the power of its feminist movements (Esteban Galarza, Hernández García & Imaz Martínez, 2017).

From Franco's dictatorship right up to the last decade, the institutionalisation of the Basque political field went hand in hand with a far-reaching mobilisation cycle which, although inspired by the leitmotif of national construction, has allowed multiple demands from a variety of sectors to merge, creating a true protest cycle with complex and comprehensive content (Zubiaga, 2014). New nationalisms, like the Basque one, are developing a discourse to include alternative neo-identity values, such as environmentalism, feminism, antimilitarism and resistance to state violence (Letamendia, 1997). In this respect, the specific nature of the mobilisation cycle and Basque national sovereignty claims in recent decades lies in the articulation of universalist left-wing values and the demands of new social movements. The result is an exceptionally active civil society, with a great diversity of popular initiatives and social groups (Zubiaga, 2014).

Against the backdrop of a society that has been highly politicised and mobilised, and one that is advancing towards a different political scenario, we cannot help but wonder about the chances of this activist culture being upheld by new generations or about the shape it may take. Apart from a commitment to the election process, opinion polls reveal that only a minority of Basque youth is actively involved in political and civic matters. Standing out in this minority is a socially significant core group that has been socialised in the activist tradition of self-organisation. It is on this group of young activists that we intend to focus in this article. The aim of the text presented below is twofold: in the first place, to identify and understand the meaning of the innovative activist practices of the politicised youth in the social and political conditions of the second modernity at local level in the Basque Country and, in the second place, to detect the lines of continuity and rupture of said practices in relation to the political tradition in which they were socialised.

2 Young People's Political Participation and the Limits of the Political Field

Young people's political participation is currently a multifaceted reality (Gozzo & Sampugnaro, 2016; Rainsford, 2017), whose understanding transcends the strict limits of participatory analysis itself. Participation inevitably leads us to a

theoretical and methodological consideration of the configuration of the political *field* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1994) in liberal democratic systems. Despite successive additions to the institutions in modern democracies in order to cater to new issues and social bases (Forbrig, 2005), the political participation of young people in Europe and other parts of the world is increasingly defined by a rise in the diversity of repertoires, which include practices not contemplated by the institutionalised forms of participation, as well as hybrid or mixed programmes (Hustinx et al., 2012; Sloam, 2016; Monticelli & Bassoli, 2016). In order to understand the current political practices of young people, we need to reflect on the nature and limits of the political field in current liberal democracies and on the forms of participation considered legitimate therein. We can appreciate that it is often the case that young people participate in ways not related to political party membership and elections (Quintelier, 2007), and, moreover, some participatory practices are not recognised as political by society (Bhavnani, 2014; Quintelier, 2007) nor, on some occasions, by the young people involved themselves (Svenningsson, 2016). Indeed, despite their engagement and interest in the collective, some young, committed people have difficulty in attributing political meaning to their activity (MacKinnon et al., 2007; Stolle et al., 2008; Rainsford, 2017) due to the categories of common sense through which they perceive the social world and the existence of an asymmetrical access to the meaning.

Indeed, there is dispute in the current political field about what should be understood as political participation as well as about the scope of the practices that may legitimately be considered as such. Sociological and political analysis is not immune to the controversies raised as a result of the adjustment of the concept to the new realities. The steady expansion of the available forms of participation in recent decades highlights the relevance of political participation for democracy and democratisation (van Deth, 2014). However, the discussion on the increased opportunities for political participation is accompanied by a growing ambivalence as regards concept. As Hooghe points out (2014), at a time when political decision-making has become fuzzy and may be seen as the result of a complex interaction between players located at different geographical levels and scales, and when political activism migrates to other spaces, experts in political behaviour should likewise shift their focus of attention in the same direction.

There has been a major conceptual leap in the evolution from a minimalist conception of political participation, channelled institutionally and aimed directly at the government, the state or the political élites, to the more individualised forms that are currently being developed in the social sphere. A broadening of the concept is already visible in Norris' (2002) proposals, when she states that activities that seek a social or civil impact or aim at changing the systematic patterns of social behaviour can be considered types of political participation. Adding this type of activity to "conventional" participatory practices already implies a considerable expansion of the concept of political participation.

In this context, there have been efforts to draw up a new, updated, conceptual map, to encompass different conceptualisations. One of the most well known is the van Deth (2014) revision, which proposes four types of political participation,

namely, a first type of institutional, conventional or formal participation; a second type of non-conventional, non-institutional or contentious political participation; a third, which covers the different types of civic, social or community commitment; and a last type of individualised and expressive political participation. This classification has been the subject of much discussion (Hooghe, 2014; Hosch-Dayican, 2014; de Moor, 2016). Yet, it is indicative of the current need to redefine and explain the expansion of the concept in the face of the wealth of emerging, changing practices, the progressive interaction between differing logics, the multiplicity of objectives of certain modes of participation and their mobility in different private, public, political and economic fields.

The way we define the political field and conceptualise political participation affects the interpretation of the changes that occur in democratic systems. In recent years, surveys carried out at various levels have shown that many young people stated that they were disenchanted or uninterested in politics. This is why a dominant discourse on youth apathy and political disconnection has become normalised in common sense social awareness as well in the academic world (Carmouché, 2012; Manning, 2014). However, recent research points to the fact that the disenchantment and low rates of participation in elections reflected in quantitative studies are a product of an excessively restrictive predominant view of the political field which is commonly held in society (Quintelier, 2007; Manning, 2014). In fact, the notion of politics that is still dominant in the political field in liberal democracies dates back to the first instance of liberal thinking formulated in the Scottish Enlightenment (Manning, 2013). The liberal model of politics is based on the public-private divide; it favours the institutionalised forms of political participation and keeps the activities of the political parties and electoral politics at its centre (O'Toole et al., 2010; Manning, 2013, 2014).

In a revisionist take on the dominant model, some qualitative research has helped clarify what youth think about politics and how they understand civic engagement, resulting in a questioning of the myth of youth "political apathy" (O'Toole et al., 2010; Carmouché, 2012). This change is related to the actual evolution of certain social sciences that have incorporated new theoretical and methodological approaches to analyse youth's current reality. The new methodological strategies have helped highlight youth discourses and narratives (Benedicto & Morán, 2015). Instead of normalising the question of youth apathy, activists' narratives afford a more complex perspective for understanding how the political disengagement of young people is built along the lines of race, class and gender and the role played by the main pillars of power and privilege in how youth's political disengagement is shaped (Gordon & Taft, 2011). Moreover, these studies suggest that young people are not totally apathetic or always reluctant to commit themselves but may reject the practices of traditional politics that tend to ignore them and their needs and in whose institutions they have no say or influence (Harris et al., 2010; Cammaerts et al., 2014; Chrysochoou & Barrett, 2017). In this context, the alleged apathy would have to be interpreted as a sign that participation occurs in places other than political institutions, places where people feel a greater sense of autonomy and control (Harris, 2001), "spaces for experience" which enables them to live according to

their principles (Pleyers, 2019) and in which they can exercise their sovereignty by creating alternative social worlds and practices (Riley et al., 2013).

In this respect, there is evidence to show that political and social participation does indeed take place but not in the way and in the places on which analysts were likely to do research up to recent times (Rainsford, 2017). The truth is that many young people cut off from conventional politics are in fact politicised, but in different ways (Varela et al., 2015; Quéniart, 2016), which are often not the object of polls in quantitative research (Quintelier, 2007). As Norris declared several decades ago, in young people's political activism, the politics of loyalties has been dropped in favour of the politics of choice, and, at the same time, it has become more common for citizens to focus on specific causes (Norris, 2004). This shift has occurred in the context of decline of political parties and a breakdown in their role as mediator between civil society and political institutions (Mair, 2013). Faced with a liberal political model, many young activists are redrawing the boundaries of political action, blurring the reference points between private spaces and daily life and collective political spaces, broadening the record of political participation and deinstitutionalising the scenarios for implementing their commitment. In this way, what we are witnessing are attempts to expand the political field in the blurred limits between society and politics, with the result that political orientations and expressions are increasingly manifesting themselves through people's daily lives. The "other possible world" begins with local and personal changes (Pleyers, 2019). This means that problems of a political nature concerning people are becoming more diversified and no longer respond only to traditional politics (Soler i Martí, 2012).

3 Struggle for Citizenship

Are young activists located on the fringes of the liberal political field failed citizens? In our perspective, the alternative forms of young people's political participation are related to the possibility of emerging forms of citizenship building. A criticism of the dominant frameworks in classical studies on youth, political participation and citizenship is that they take a top-down approach, building political participation in terms of traditional forms of engagement like voting or joining a political party. When political participation is defined in such a limited way, the logic of the dominant framework concludes that if young people do not vote, they are flawed citizens. However, what has been defined as political disaffection should be renamed as institutional disaffection (Soler i Martí, 2012) and new ways of relating to politics (Parés, 2014). The traditional citizenship frameworks fail to reflect the different ways in which young people understand and act on social networks and political issues. Young people are in an unequal relationship with traditional political structures. Engaging with the prevailing system is, for some of them, like supporting a political model with which one may be in disagreement and accepting a subordinate position in it (Harris, 2001). Thus, the decision taken by many young people to aim their political energy at the building of spaces of participation and of

citizenship models not linked to the state, on the fringes of the liberal political field, makes sense and is further reinforced by a perceived ineffectiveness of the democratic system in relation to issues that affect them directly (Riley et al., 2013). This perception must be understood in the framework of a generalised distrust of governance institutions and practices, caused by the progressive loss of control by citizens over states and markets. Political institutions are increasingly powerless to transform private suffering into public problems (Bauman, 2001). The feeling of disenchantment is particularly acute in younger generations who do not feel the weight of political tradition. The consequence of the rupture between citizens and governments has led to a “hollowing” of representative democracy in Europe (Mair, 2013) and, in short, to the current legitimacy crisis of liberal democracy (Castells, 2018).

The processes of neoliberal globalisation and the repositioning of the states in the new and complex networks of global power have brought with them citizenship building practices far removed from formal citizenship defined in relation to the state (Sassen, 2003). Citizenship, which in the liberal paradigm has been described as a frame of elements that interrelate the individual case and the state's political and legal system, has been radically transformed. The result is that, beyond formal rights – and as a consequence of the decline of the same – multiple dynamics and non-formalised citizenship actors which develop alternative practices and constructs have gained relevance. Women who, *de facto*, continue to have limited access to citizenship, migrants excluded from it, young people who live in situations of mass precariousness and ethnic or national groups in situations of political subordination or social marginalisation are some of the groups engaged in said practices.

A consequence of such processes is that, within the current political field, tensions arise between the notion of citizenship as a formal legal condition and citizenship as a project or aspiration (Sassen, 2003), between citizenship as a status and citizenship as a practice (Isin, 2009; Morán & Benedicto, 2016). The disputes unfolding in the political field in order to establish a legitimate definition of citizenship have forced social analysis to build new, more elaborate conceptual instruments intended for understanding increasingly complex and diverse realities (Isin, 2009). Such instruments aim at responding to principles of greater inclusivity and diversity. This has given rise to new concepts such as multicultural citizenship which alludes to minority group rights (Kymlicka, 1996); digital citizenship, as a new form of participation and political commitment (Mossberger et al., 2008); consumer citizenship (Kyroglou & Henn, 2017); “multi-layered” citizenship (Yuval Davis, 2010), understood as a multi-layered construct – local, ethnic, national, state, supra-state, etc.; intimate citizenship, associated with women's sexual and reproductive rights (Yuval Davis, 2011); and many other types of practices.

The wealth of increasingly diverse conceptual repertoires to describe the multiple dimensions of citizenship practices illustrates the fluid and dynamic nature of the institution of citizenship, which must be theorised by inevitably linking it to the social and political struggle that is part of it (Isin, 2009). Thus, citizen “sites” are fields for contesting – which can operate at a variety of levels – in which subjects, interests and positions converge and in which new actors aspire to become political

subjects. It must be remembered that, although citizenship has undergone significant changes, it is still an institution of domination and empowerment. At the same time, the “acts” of citizenship are constituent, the acts themselves producing the subjects, producing them, moreover, while questioning the law and interrupting the practices and regulations governing the political field. These acts of citizenship transform the political forms and modes of being as they create new actors as “activist citizens”. As Isin points out (2009), unlike the “active citizen”, who acts according to prescribed guidelines in the political field – voting, paying taxes, etc. – the figure of the “activist citizen” calls into question the nature of a given political field, opening up its limits and participating in writing a script and creating a scene, that is to say redefining the hitherto prevailing legitimate logic in the political field.

Currently, the permanent tensions generated by the dynamics of citizen inclusion and exclusion are produced in a political field that is marked, on the one hand, by the cultural individualisation processes of late modernity and, on the other, by neoliberal economic policies whose logic has increasingly prevailed in them. Both forces come together and are interdependent in the political field. Indeed, youth participation (Touraine, 1997) is one of the spheres clearly reflecting the processes of individualisation and deinstitutionalisation that have been affecting the political field and dimensioning it in recent decades (Bauman, 2001; Beck, 1996; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). Said processes of individualisation provoke changes in the political field towards what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim call “self-politics” (2002) and Giddens call “life politics” (1991). They are political action models seeking to respond to the increasingly restricted options for democratic agency in the face of neoliberal capitalism and encourage forms of politicisation of leisure, consumption and daily life as a means to affirm people’s political agency and their self-realisation (Riley et al., 2013; Kyroglou & Henn, 2017). Thus, the restructuring of the political field is accompanied by the emergence in younger generations of forms of citizenship no longer linked to elections but to individualised engagements and related to ways of life which up till now were considered “non-political”: lifestyles, diet routines and recycling, internet activities, consumer habits and cultural options (Amnå et al., 2009). These practices reflect a progressive shift to new niches of activity and identity. Activist culture itself has changed; it is increasingly based on more individualised modalities, far removed from the conventional actors of institutionalised civil society, and which combine a great sensitivity to global challenges and a powerful subjective dimension of the commitment itself (Pleyers, 2016).

On the other hand, the withdrawal from conventional politics to individualised repertoires in daily life (Manning, 2014) is consistent with the type of citizenship fomented by neoliberal policies. In this respect, neoliberal rhetoric has significant implications for both the shaping of people’s subjectiveness and their forms of socio-political participation. Through discourses on freedom of choice and responsibility, neoliberal argumentation understands citizens as being bound by the values of self-control, management and entrepreneurship, giving rise to the ideal of the autonomous, rational citizen, a risk manager and somebody responsible for their own destiny (Ong, 2006). In this way, the concept of citizenship shifts from a series

of rights provided by the state to its citizens to a series of responsibilities which the former must take on, among others responsibility for their own welfare by participating in the market (Riley et al., 2013). The logic of neoliberal subjectivity therefore creates a series of favourable conditions so that a whole range of informal activities linked to youth leisure (Pfaff, 2009; Riley et al., 2013), consumption (Kyroglou & Henn, 2017) and daily life can become spaces of political activity.

However, the individualisation of the lives of youth and their alleged freedom of choice have a flip side. Many young people, forced to design and build their life story outside the haven of the institutions (Beck, 1996) by drawing on their own resources and skills, are often deprived of these means. Thus, for the majority of young people, current youth transitions develop in a situation of precariousness as regards their labour conditions and economy (Santamaría, 2018), considerable uncertainty and the absence of biographical linearity (Furlong et al., 2006; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). In fact, the tendency to consider the complexity of youth transitions as a symptom of “choice biographies” has helped unmask structures spreading disadvantage and vulnerability that are the result of flexible labour markets (Furlong et al., 2006). In this context, conditions of uncertainty, risk and individualisation often lead many young people to shun political activity. The former likewise give rise to transitory and self-expressive participatory practices, which create new citizenship biographies characterised by weak dynamics and fluid and short-lived commitments (Harris et al., 2010).

As pointed out by Pirni and Rafini (2016), the risk we run by placing too much emphasis on the individual and on sanctioning the total disappearance of the collective dimension is to foment an epistemological fallacy, by supposing that the process of individualisation implies the fading of the influence of the structures. The traditional forms of social stratification still hold the key to understanding life's possibilities, despite the fact that the subjective awareness of the influence of such structures has diminished accordingly as life experiences become more individualised (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Gozzo & Sampugnaro, 2016). It is common for youth activism to be linked to ideas like creation, reflexive judgement and sense of agency – Bang, for example, speaks of citizens who are creators of daily life, “everyday makers” (2010). Nonetheless, the creative nature attributed to young activists must be understood within the framework of the constraints imposed by structural factors on a social group like youth. Young people do not form an internally homogeneous collective; they are characterised, on the one hand, by elements of social differentiation – implied by power resources, such as age, social class, gender, racialisation and migrant status – and, on the other, by political traditions and the institutional conditions of each particular context. It would be more precise to speak of *youths* rather than youth, in order to analyse the complex forms of being a “politicised youth” and understand the diverse oppressions acting on these subjects (Ballesté & Feixa, 2019). Consequently, differences in families and access to resources, in terms of finance, relations and knowledge, as well as the institutionalised or informal opportunities of the political field and its determinations, must be taken into consideration in the participatory practices of young people and in their level of politicisation. Gender, social class and cultural capital are still the best

predictors of political participation, both at the institutional and informal level (Quintelier, 2007; Hustinx et al., 2012; Mascheroni, 2015).

The dispositions and skills socially incorporated by young people as *habitus* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1994) such as opportunities for participation and experimentation are resources that intervene as forms of capital within the political field. Therefore, they condition participation or inaction. However, it must be noted that not only youth apathy is actively created through multiple processes and points of social exclusion (Gordon & Taft, 2011), but the same applies to participation in activism itself. Analytical tools like intersectionality have helped us to articulately analyse the different systems of domination and subordination and allow us to identify them in the fields of political activism. Thus, in the activist subfield we can see numerous categories of segregation and domination. One of the most common forms of segregation derives from male domination (Larrinaga & Amurrio, 2017). But there are also many other ways. For example, there are young people without experience compared to adults with a long activist career (Ballesté & Feixa, 2019). There are also “expert participants” who use their skills to build networks and cooperate with politicians, elites, interest groups, versus non-expert participants who lack those competences, or migrant participants whose voice is silenced by local activists. All these patterns made up by these binary categories reveal, on the one hand, the complexity of power relations in the activist subfield and, on the other, how hard it is for activist action to reflect the diversity of the players that make it up and the obstacles that hinder their participation, visibility and expression (Dunezat, 2017).

With regard to the differential access to participation resources and the asymmetric acquisition of the necessary dispositions for activism, the analyses developed on the basis of Bourdieu’s conceptual formulations likewise point to the need to unravel the structure of opportunities and barriers underlying youth participation, making it possible only for some (Mascheroni, 2015). Thus, these analyses highlight the asymmetric conditions of acquisition of “participatory capital” (Wood, 2014) or of “militant capital” (Matonti & Poupeau, 2004). They also reveal the obstacles that restrict the possibility to build “radical *habitus*”, understood as a series of dispositions necessary for activism that imply a particular way to perceive and understand the world, knowledge and the inclination to fight. All these differential dispositions are acquired through participation in criticism and active protest (Crossley, 2003).

4 Methodology

In the empirical research carried out on the political participation of young people in the Basque Country, we used two methodological considerations as our starting point. The first is that, in comparison with quantitative studies, qualitative methodology can offer greater possibilities for perceiving the diversity of young people’s emerging participatory repertoires while allowing us to understand the meaning of

politics in their lives (O'Toole et al., 2010; Carmouché, 2012). The second is that, in a context of tension between dominant cultural narratives and counter-hegemonic cultures, qualitative methodology is more suitable for identifying heretical discourses.

Consequently, our study takes as a basis qualitative methodology, through in-depth interviews carried out on young people from different regions of the Basque Country in Spain, throughout 2018. We started off with a sample made up of 22 young people, between the ages of 18 and 35, who had defined themselves as activists or committed people. However, in the narratives of the young people committed to civic and political participation, it was observed that the participatory practices have diverse orientations as far as their innovative capacity is concerned. In this respect, we saw that political experimentation and innovation are not typical of young people affiliated to political parties or trade unions, which are centralised and highly bureaucratic organisations, relatively impervious to change and with pre-set patterns of conduct for their militants. For this reason, the final sample selected for the subsequent analysis was reduced to a group of 17 young people – 8 socialised as female and 9 as male – of between 18 and 35, with declared political implication outside the sphere of political parties.

With an aim to obtaining the greatest possible diversity in discourses, apart from geographical origin, also taken into account were the size of the town of origin; social origin, indirectly stated in the conversations (nine were from working class families and eight from middle class families); the type of school they had attended – public, private, religious, all-Basque, etc.; and employment history. Ten of the young people were working or had worked, with varying degrees of intermittence and precariousness. Thirteen of the interviews were held in Basque and four in Spanish. All the young people had post-secondary studies or were currently studying.

They were people committed to different causes, civic organisations and a wide variety of movements, related to socioecology, the feminist movement, the revitalisation of Basque, self-managed space and squats, youth assemblies, student bodies, refugee reception, social economy groups, popular organisations for the right to decide the political status of the Basque Country, anti-racist movements, groups against social exclusion, the LGTBI movement and organisations involved in popular festivities. Nonetheless, it should be noted that multi-activism defines many of the people interviewed, so some of them are involved in more than one cause or participate in more than one organisation or movement. Moreover, this collective is characterised by their early political socialisation, particularly in left-wing Basque nationalist community spheres, and also by its intense activist experience, not only in organisations but also in more informal and varied participatory spaces, in which weaker institutional regulation allows for more space for creativity and experimentation.

The interviews are part of wider research in which 31 in-depth interviews were carried out and 4 discussion groups were held between young people from the Basque Country, with varying forms and degrees of civic and political engagement (Larrinaga et al., 2020; Larrinaga et al., 2021).

5 Basque Activist Youth: Participation and Innovation on the Fringes of the Political Field

The forms of participation prioritised by the more innovative young people imply an intensification of politicisation in the field of daily life. They focus their concern and interest on daily activities, as they consider that the political system fails to offer opportunities for satisfying their needs. The politicisation of private spheres of action is an element of the political culture inherited from Basque activism linked to both the Francoist underground period and the subsequent policies of popular and national construction. This culture has been characterised by counter-hegemonic political sectors in their fight against the Spanish state. However, this element of continuity now contains more individualised features. Thus, the initiatives of the new generations are starting to weaken the supremacy held by the political parties and organisations and are gradually giving greater importance to practices carried out in the fields of daily life – despite the fact that many young activists retain their membership of different bodies. In this way, they attribute political meaning to ordinary activities and choices: the language they use to communicate, how relations between people and the relations of domination and subordination they face are shaped, the type of job they choose, their forms of consumption, the model of relationship with nature, the freedom to develop their sexuality, the opportunities for building individual and collective identities, etc. The actions developed in all these spaces are turned into ethical and political actions in the life of the young activists. The attribution of political meaning takes the participatory repertoires beyond conventional political institutions and extends the political field beyond the limits of liberal democratic systems.

I turned my militancy around (...) In my opinion, that change in the political cycle had an impact. It's not just the fact that ETA had laid down its arms. I think it coincides with the transformation processes in the twenty first century (...) I believe that the fact that the political conflict is no longer so intense, though it persists, has helped. (Female, 27, feminist group)

In my view, politics can be done from anywhere: in your group of friends, in your job, in your place of study... And you don't need to belong to any particular structure or organisation (...) politics exists outside political parties (...). And this is only growing in strength, from what I can see around me. (Female, 26, left-wing nationalist youth organisation)

Generally speaking, young Basque activists have a strong sense of political agency and a great capacity for reflection. Nonetheless, they are unaware of the pillars of privilege that enable them to be that way, unlike other young people alienated from politics: their early socialisation in the family and community in highly politicised fields, pre-existing informal and organisational networks which have multiplied their opportunities for participation, the accumulated political capital in the shape of

participatory dispositions and skills and, in many cases, the differential cognitive resources linked to social origin or their educational level.

With this agency status as their starting point, they gradually began to shun the intermediation of conventional political organisations where they had their first learning in politics. In some cases, it implies a generational, political rupture as regards interests and political agenda. On the other hand, they believe that all social change begins with the transformation of oneself and with one's actions, be they related to language, sexuality, consumer and diet habits or life and work alternatives. In their opinion, politics is not an external sphere separated from daily life in which people need to integrate in order to reach their objectives. On the contrary, according to this conception, what is public and private, the self and daily life are closely interconnected in political action. Young activist people aspire to become political subjects, not in the way that politicians and institutions do, but rather by building their lives in their own fashion. With the increase in the number of political practices based on the individual and daily existence, this action framework entails an individualisation of political repertoires and, in parallel, a weakening of institutional models – to which they are largely heirs, as regards the acquisition of participatory dispositions.

I think that, generally speaking, there is a break, or difference, between the old and new generations (...) I think that the "old" sector is living its struggle (...) We young people are working on other channels (...) I can see that we are immersed in the fight for a new model of life. I have been active because my parents were left-wing nationalist sympathisers. What I mean is, I am not disputing that perspective. I think they have made an enormous contribution and that's why we are here. Otherwise there would not be such an interest in activism in the Basque Country (...) But, in some aspects, I feel a little distant (...) That's why I am squatting (...) some among us are ready to quit this model imposed by capitalism (...) Young people's lives are not bad because the Basque Country is not independent (...), young people's lives are bad because they have no money for studying (...) Errekaleor [a community of squats] is just one example. I attach greater importance to that than to ethnicity. (Male, 20, student organisation)

You realize that young people are not the future, we are also the present. And our opinion must also be heard now. (Female, 25, platform for the right to decide in the Basque Country)

Where I buy my oranges is political. Or who I buy my milk from is also political. Because we can have an impact with these little things (...) That's why I say that everything is political, that all the little decisions we make are political. (Male, 35, socioecology group)

In such a context, on what do young activists focus their energy? As already mentioned, they do not focus, in the main, on areas of institutionalised politics, although some of them still maintain formal links with it. On the contrary, in a context of progressively individualised culture, their political participation has predominantly taken hold in spaces where they have the chance to develop an opposing force, autonomy and control. In fact, young people channel their activity in the spheres in

which they can put their sovereignty into practice; in them, they try to build social spaces and alternative forms of life. To this end, their citizenship building is based on the demands for core values like autonomy and sovereignty.

In this respect, their political practices point to a quest for coherence between values and actions. Their commitment is underpinned by this premise, as evidenced by many of their statements. Therefore, through their own action, young people can put their beliefs, values and ideals into practice and, consequently, ensure consistency between what they think and what they do. Equality, cooperation, solidarity, justice, ecology, food sovereignty, fair trade, linguistic equality, feminism, freedom, anticapitalism, social transformation and other values mentioned in the interviews are not, for the young activists, banal principles, devoid of content, but rather guidelines for the action they take in their lives.

We drew up a list of values, and built our work around them. (Male, 33, organisation involved in popular festivities)

At first, the starting point was which type of Astra [name of the self-managed space] we wanted. And then it was decided what we should be, from the ideological point of view: intercultural, feminist, antimilitarist.... (Female, 30, self-managed cultural space)

In an outlook on life which seems to implicate personal life and political action, the world of work and leisure are a further chapter in the commitment of young activists. There is no doubt that their implication must be understood as a *continuum* in their life space and time. Therefore, leisure and social relations and, on certain occasions, their professional activity too seem to be included in the commitment. By affording an ethical sense to their job choice, they redefine the meaning of work. In that way, in young people's experience, work seems associated with values like sustainability, care for others and justice and also with the possibilities for creative self-expression. Consequently, participation no longer seems delimited in the dimensions of time and space, and there is no time break in their commitment between one political action and another. On the contrary, participation appears to be deeply engrained in daily activity, and engagement has been broadened to take in all spheres and moments of personal life.

For me, there is no limit, I do not know how to set limits between my work and social commitment. What I mean is, when am I working and when am I being an activist? It's all one thing nowadays, so...., I would say that it is not work, it is a passion, and I am paid to satisfy my passion. (Male, 27, association for the revitalisation of Basque)

Politically, I have given up organizational activism. Currently, I am not in any [organizational] structure. But I understand that my life is much more politicized, because, for example, all my food comes from baskets from sustainable consumption groups. As for leisure, I give a lot of thought to what, why and all that. I try to interpret all my relations through a more political lens. My work is political. We do politics when we offer a service, or we help another cooperative. And the work itself is an instrument for doing politics within [the company]. (Female, 25, social economy and processing cooperative)

The commitment of young innovative activists has an impact on the development of the self and on the building of both individual and collective identities. Their

implication is aimed not only at others but also at themselves, insofar as participation helps build the young person's identity. Undoubtedly, in innovative activism, this construction is part of a process of reflection on oneself and one's life journey, in accordance with the consequences of the progressive deinstitutionalisation of current society, including the loss of influence of Basque political parties on young people as providers of civic and political identities. In this way, for politicised young people, political commitment contributes to the building and strengthening of their image; it helps them develop their self-esteem and reinforce a positive and empowered representation of themselves. In consequence, we can appreciate parallel processes in young activists, in relation to continuity and to rupture with political traditions that have been transmitted to them in the Basque political field. On the one hand, there has been a watering down of inherited identities and strong political loyalties, even when they formally admit to being heirs to them. There is likewise an evident rejection of pre-built political and ideological "packs". On the other hand, there is increased reflection on oneself and one's actions in the activity carried out with others.

The League is a nonpartisan association. Yes, we are anticapitalist and feminist. But we cannot advocate [for a political organisation]. Yes, obviously, we need to have an ideology, but it is not homogeneous (...) Our main interest is in our identities, our orientations and an acceptance of them. (Female, 21, LGTBI)

You have your concerns, why you do things, etc. And, with time, you put your mind in order, and you ask yourself what we are doing. (Male, 33, organisation of popular festivities)

I myself began to reflect on my identity and my position. (Female, 27, feminist group)

In this respect, political participation enables young people with greater political capital to question predominant values and relations in society and broaden their life options through new experiences. Moreover, activist experience encourages them to rethink their previously held positions, to trust in themselves and reposition themselves in the political field and, on certain occasions, to overcome their previous limitations; this is the case of young feminists who are empowered and resocialised on the basis of renewed principles, rewriting their life story in a thoughtful way, or of other activists who are capable of analysing in a self-reflective fashion some of their privileges in the activist field. The contributions made by feminists are undoubtedly one of the clearest influences on innovation in current Basque youth activism and are increasingly incorporated into innovative young people's activist *habitus*.

The youth movement was a time of "let's think about ourselves, let's focus on relations (...) and move on from the response stage". I don't know, it was focusing on other key areas, ready to move onto a more constructive stage. Then, although we didn't use those terms at that time, an important base was feminism. And not looking so much to the external world to see how to change it, but rather to our interior, to see which roles, which power relations we were replicating among ourselves (...) I discovered a patriarchal structure (...), I identified the power relations, male dominance, and the differential difficulties we have had as women. (Female, 27, feminist group)

As we have seen, working on oneself, living on the basis of one's own values and learning from this process are required tasks for young activists in the individualised society. In a time when social institutions find it harder than before to regulate people's lives – among the former being political parties and organisations which continue to play the key role in counter-hegemonic activity in Basque society – acting politically is not just an individual or collective action in favour of political and social change. It is also an experience of personal emancipation, which plays a decisive role in learning about oneself and building identity. In addition, on many occasions, activism helps young people to build an identity that ensures satisfaction and pleasure. Indeed, young activists frequently refer in their declarations to the social integration enabled by political participation and the symbolic gratification it implies for the young people participating. Unquestionably, the interviews reveal that the feelings of social and personal realisation give meaning to participation and reinforce the latter just as much as it does the cause being pursued. Thus, in youth transitions, activism has opened the doors to young participants for their integration in different groups; it has given them the opportunity to organise sociability networks in interaction with other young people, to share with them their emotions, to feel satisfaction in the struggles they consider legitimate and, in short, to create a community and ways of belonging which are “family”-like in progressively individualised contexts. There is no doubt that political participation is a mechanism that generates meaning and impregnates all spheres of the life of the young, committed person. In consequence, symbolic gratification often turns into a source of motivation, in order to go forward with the activism.

I was very motivated from the start. I soon realised that this was my place (...) there was so much hope and joy, everything was wonderful, people were seen to be highly motivated, working with great enthusiasm (...) At the same time it was very hard (...) But (...) I found my place, I saw that it was worthwhile, that what we did delivered results (...) At that time friendships were built, and I spent a lot of time with them, and each action empowered us a little more, we saw we could, and that was lovely. (Female, 25, platform for the right to decide in the Basque Country)

Individualisation and collective sense are linked in the activists' discourses. By participating and putting their political commitment into practice, the young people interviewed are declaring their intention to act together with others. Unlike its frequent interpretation as a concept of individualisation that weakens the possibilities of collective action, the intentions of the young Basque innovators expressed in the interviews would appear to indicate that individualised political practices have a collective dimension. Thus, individualisation and collectivism establish two core areas in new youth activism, one of continuity with the community and participatory politics tradition still prevailing in a significant part of Basque society and another of disconnection with said tradition. The participatory *habitus* ingrained in the spheres of political learning of Basque counter-hegemonic tradition maintains its continuity in the basic momentum aimed at participation and commitment transmitted to new activist generations. However, this participatory *habitus* seems to have been tailored to the new structural conditions of the current political field. Specifically, collective regulations have been weakened. The collective is no longer

of fixed consistency; its forms are far more diverse. In the absence of valid behaviour patterns for the new situation, the young people with activist *habitus* are obliged to build other ties of belonging in their interaction with others, for them to be recognised in a group, to create links in communities of interest and take part in collective actions in favour of different causes. Thus, activist engagement provides the young participants with the feeling of belonging to a group. In this aspect, participation is structuring; it affords them the opportunity to satisfy their individual and collective identity needs and to perceive that they have found “their place” in the world. Generally speaking, this sense of belonging does not refer to the state and, sometimes, not even to the Basque institutional political field, but rather to more informal and local communities, or simply to micropolitics which spring up locally but are connected to global action rationale.

I have never formed part of any collective because I was not one hundred per cent in agreement with the ideals or what was being upheld, but I am here. We are learning together from each other. We have a debating club. So, if I have any doubts about something, there is a proper way of asking, because there are identity issues that can hurt, and we try and have a debate about it (...) It is something we are building gradually. (Female, 21, LGTBI)

I think that first year was mainly (...) a squat with eight young persons who understood each other very well, a highly politicized house, with great companionship, a wonderful life in community, a solid centre which had a direct impact on the development of the neighbourhood. (Male, 26, community of self-managed squats)

In this way, though they do have a prior cultural and organisational foundation in Basque society, the new dimensions of community and the collective must be produced and reproduced by the activists themselves under the new political and social conditions of the second modernity. In doing so, young people have lost the linearity of their life story; they are obliged to have at their disposal the participatory skills and resources that help them form networks, establish alliances and negotiate with others at a variety of levels. At the same time, these networks allow them to cope with the lack of stability and the uncertainty generated in the current economic and social environment. An example of the same are the feminist proposals which advocate decentralised, diverse and flexible organisational forms that facilitate the harmonisation of collective collaboration as well as the defence of the complexity of activist identities.

In my opinion, there is a lot to learn, for example, from the feminist movement. Because we, the young generations in the feminist movement, are uniting and organising ourselves. I think there is a permeability, a greater scope for testing and getting it right (...) And another thing, for being able to work from your own identity, and respond to, and reflect on, your own problems, starting from yourself. I think that feminism offers theoretical instruments for that: how the different systems of exploitation and domination intersect, and what position women, young women, black women ... hold. And then, maybe we need more flexible forms of relationship, that is, with the possibility to come together and then separate, instead of working like a rigid structure, working like an octopus, with different ramifications, which acts depending on the needs at every given moment. (Female, 27, feminist group)

Consequently, in our view, the forms of individualisation identified in the experiences of the young innovative activists are collaborative. In point of fact, the will to act together with others characterises the attempts to define their identities in a self-sufficient fashion, always in cooperation with others. Logically, this task is made easier in such social contexts as have a very dense and consistent community – life-medium and small-sized towns in Basque society, highly mobilised neighbourhoods in big cities – and in those where the political tradition of self-organisation lives on.

The squat happened because we needed a place. In fact, Gernika has always been an active [town], there have always been lots of associations and social movements (...) The conditions stated that it [the cultural space] be managed by the people, that the council have no say, and that it be self-managed. That's why a process got underway, a participatory process in the town. (Female, 30, self-managed cultural space)

In general, the youth political practices studied among young Basque activists can be considered laboratories of social innovation which, from the fringes of the political field, compete to broaden or substitute prevailing forms of citizenship with other alternatives. The dominant form of citizenship in the twentieth century was built in relation to the state, and it still exists thanks mainly to electoral participation. Opposed to this model, youth activist participation has opened up ways to diversify participation by continued experimentation with alternative life formulas and socio-political models which have shifted politics to personal and social life. These experimental practices by young activists, who seek transformation and emancipation in highly diverse spheres and through very different forms, reveal some common ground but also many turning points. With their creative workshops, their role is prefigurative as they anticipate future models on the fringes of the political and social fields, generating and exchanging knowledge and experience, testing new forms of self-organisation, starting up new cultural and socio-economic projects and rehearsing other forms of relation. In short, they try to break the barriers of what is socially possible.

When away, we tended to live in communes, altogether, and we organised everything between us, depending on the needs (...) That's where you see that another model of life is possible. (Male, 18, diverse popular initiatives)

There are currently one hundred or so people squatting (...) Our intention is to take over the means of production little by little and be less and less dependent on the market. On the one hand, strengthening the community, with healthy social relations and, on the other, showing that another model is possible. Most of us living here are young people. (Male, 26, community of self-managed squats)

6 Conclusions

In this text, we have analysed the innovative political practices carried out by young Basque activists on the fringes of the political field as defined in liberal democracies. We considered these practices as active citizenship acts that broaden the sense

of what is political. In this aspect, political participation is shifted to the spheres of daily life, which are transformed into new sites of citizenship.

The analysis has allowed us to demonstrate the importance of the particular socio-political context for the development of innovative political participation by young activists. The transformation of the young participants into citizens who are activist subjects has as its background a very particular structure for political opportunity in the Basque political field: a longstanding, counter-hegemonic and activist culture of community politics, linked to “nation building” projects. This is the culture in which they were socialised at an early age and which has allowed them to acquire political *habitus* prone to transformative and creative participation as well as the appropriate dispositions for identifying and interpreting the opportunities offered by the political field.

Despite seeing themselves as heirs to this tradition, many young activists have pursued the exploration of areas less regulated in terms of organisation and have carried out political experiments following a more individualised programme, in which self-fulfilment and socio-political commitment, daily micropolitics and collective activism combine. In this respect, their participatory *habitus* has adapted to the new political, cultural and structural conditions of societies typical of the second modernity. Heritage and experimentation are combined in their practices.

Contrary to some approaches that consider individualisation and a sense of the collective as mutually exclusive, we believe that both dimensions are present in the innovative activist practices of Basque youth. Having observed their experience, we defend the idea that individualised politics and personal life projects can be orientated and require the collaboration and cooperation between equals in order for them to be carried out. Nonetheless, collective orientation does not exist per se. On the contrary, it requires the young people involved to possess the necessary relational and cognitive resources in order to build networks and collaboration links in participatory practices, as is the case with the young people in the study.

In this respect, we can corroborate the evidence that has been shown in numerous research projects on the structural restrictions conditioning youth participation and the possibilities of an activist citizenship. In fact, the young innovative activists in our study are a minority, equipped with great political capital, even more activist capital. However, their narratives only reveal gender biases as main points of exclusion within the activist subfield itself.

Despite the fact that the young people interviewed come from different social and family backgrounds, we believe that they share an element that has ironed out these differences: early exposure to participation in politicised community settings and longstanding activist experience, which has enabled them to act autonomously and take chances in their innovative political initiatives. In consequence, we can conclude that, for the individual, the activist experience is, in itself, a cognitive activity that generates critical capacity and skills for building reality, particularly in spheres with weak institutional regulation. Moreover, socially, the opportunities afforded by the particular socio-political context decisively condition their acquisition. Thus, we feel that the incidence of both factors must be given equal

consideration to other structural resources in the study of the emergence of new activist citizen practices.

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Considerations on the Democratic Challenge from the Perspective of Social Services: Community, Participation and (In)equality



Nerea Zubillaga-Herran  and Noemi Bergantiños 

Abstract This chapter offers a view on the need to find a more democratic approach to the social services system. We start from the premise that the current social services system encounters serious difficulties when trying to respond to, and transform, the different problems facing a social reality greatly impacted by injustice and social inequality. The commitment to greater democracy is therefore inevitable from the point of view of what was supposed to be one of the fundamental pillars of the welfare system. A review of some documents and access to some survey data afford an opportunity to discuss what we have called “greater community”/“intensified community”, understood as a strategy allowing social services to develop a model based on participation and community perspective as preferential lines of intervention. The defence of this intensified community allows us to recognize the importance of working with the community towards the construction of active citizenship, this being understood as a fundamental condition for developing democracy. Following an overview of the main postulates supporting this interpretation, a brief summary of the reality of the Basque social services system is provided with the aim to outline the scope of greater community proposed herein.

Keywords Intensified community care · Citizenship · Territory · Community social work

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1 Introduction: Participation and Community – An Opportunity for Social Services?

This work provides an overview of the challenges and threats facing social services, in order to subsequently offer proposals that focus on participation and the community perspective as tools to help provide the social services with an orientation in accordance with the principles of a strengthened democracy. Although some international works are referenced, this reflection on social services focuses fundamentally on the Spanish context, as the social services systems of the different Autonomous Communities share elements that place them within a Mediterranean welfare model. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that particular attention is made to the Basque social services system.

It is important to stress that this approach is carried out from the community dimension of social work, with the understanding that social services are basically powered by the principles and models of intervention offered by the discipline of social work. In order to give structure and sequence to this proposal, we start from at least two premises: (i) that the democratic system must avail (to a greater extent) of social services as a fundamental pillar for the defence of the common good and social protection and (ii) that a relational, participatory and community perspective of social services allows action to be taken concerning the challenges posed by social inequality from the perspective of strengthened democracy. Last of all, this work offers a brief description and assessment of the presence and development of the community dimension in the Basque social services system.

A reflection on the enhancement of democracy in social services is even more necessary nowadays. The current context of crisis highlights one of the main characteristics of the abovementioned democratic crisis: that referring to the persistent and possible worsening of inequality (Bergantiños & Ibarra, 2018, p. 19). Furthermore, the debate on the problems of the “actually existing democracy” has inevitably been alluding to the different and manifest forms of exclusion that the latter includes (Subirats, 2018, p. 44). In this respect, it could be said that the former financial crisis as well as other social transformations generated a climate of uncertainty in which the actual capacity of the welfare state (SIIS, 2019) to cope with situations of inequality and exclusion was questioned.

The different solutions put forward for the contexts of crisis reveal that responses based on the principles of austerity (debt reduction and reduced investment in public expenditure) and late neoliberalism (Rolnick, 2013) generate tension with the principles of a social state (Gordillo, 2013). Thus, increased unemployment, poverty and social inequalities (Intermón-Oxfam, 2016; EAPN, 2019; Foessa, 2019) cast doubt on the efficacy of the austerity models as a solution to the crisis (Flores Paredes & Nieto Solís, 2013; Bergantiños et al., 2017) and highlight the weaknesses of welfare policies with neoliberal orientation (Morales-Villena & Mestre, 2020) that focus on the idea that the individual faces diverse and multiple threats on their own (Torres & Garzón, 2010, p. 221).

In this context, the need for answers in terms of regeneration and democratic alternatives is likewise crucial in the sphere of social services. Beyond the traditional view of social services as a tool for assisting in solving social problems (Hernandez-Echegaray, 2019), the latter could be considered as an agent and a scope of action in itself, since they arose from the need to understand reality on the basis of interaction and communication with people, this quality of interaction being a source of democratic power and a commitment to designing social politics in democratic terms (Bouverne-De Bie et al., 2014). In this respect, we understand that participation and, specifically, community engagement become a fundamental tool for transforming social reality in terms of democracy.

The development of Autonomous Community regulations concerning social services echoes the consideration that citizen engagement is one of the keys in processes seeking inclusion and attaining equality of opportunities or social justice. Moreover, it could be said that this trend is similar in other European countries (Pestoff, 2009), where different ways of involving citizenry in providing and governing social services are being sought, with an aim to work on the challenges faced by the system.

Participation in the area of social services is contemplated from a variety of viewpoints. On the one hand is people's participation in the design, implementation and assessment of social policies, through structures that allow for the engagement of different social players. On the other is the direct participation of the citizenry in their own process of social intervention. This dimension implying the participation of users of social services is the one that has been most addressed from the scientific and professional point of view, with progress being made in diagnoses and intervention plans shared or co-led between experts and the people being attended (Zamanillo, 2008; Santos, 2012). Lastly, it is understood that, generally speaking, participation in social services must address a community and relational perspective aimed at promoting, from the communities themselves, support networks and forms of social relation with an aim to transform the environment into areas with greater equality and social justice.

Participation in social services is likewise an opportunity to work with people who, on many occasions, find themselves in a situation of vulnerability or social exclusion. These situations appear to indicate that a return to participation is fundamental and that being able to feel part of a group is vital (Arenas, 2016). In this respect, some studies underline the importance of creating processes and structures in which people can take part in defining their own future well-being (Truell, 2019, p. 756) as well as in the social policies and services that underpin the welfare state.

In relation to the aforesaid, the latest laws concerning social services passed in the Spanish Autonomous Community framework explicitly refer to the importance of participation as a central element to be developed at the different levels and in the different areas of social intervention (Government of Valencia, 2019; Andalusian Government, 2016; Government of Aragon, 2009; Basque Government, 2008; Catalanian Government, 2007; Alemán, 2010). In the case of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (CAPV), which we shall study in more detail later, Act 12/2008 concerning Social Services includes the need to foment

participation with the implication of the citizens affected while, at the same time, considering engagement as one of the principles of the system itself, as well as being one of three mechanisms for reaching its objectives:

To promote the participation of the community in the resolution of social needs that can be met within the framework of social services, and, in particular, the individual, organised engagement of the users and the bodies active in the social service sphere. (Basque Government, 2008, art. 6.2b)

2 Social Services and the Welfare State: A Critical Review

In this section, we shall offer an overview of social services from the viewpoint of Truell's idea regarding the challenge they face in order to reinforce their role to enable and build community engagement in a democratic process focused on sustainability and social justice (2019, p. 757). To this end, we shall start by conceptualising and contextualising the development of social services and then go on to identify and characterise the different orientations and perspectives that run through them, as well as the current challenges and obstacles in order to foment social justice and social transformation.

In democratic states, together with education, employment or health policies, social services have been set up as one of the fundamental pillars of the welfare state. Among their objectives, of note is that of guaranteeing social protection and covering social needs, by means of benefits and services deployed in different administrations and tiers of competence. However, historically, they have had a smaller projection than other systems of protection, and, together with the welfare state itself, they have experienced a certain weakening that has undermined their capacity and original objectives (Fantova, 2014).

The introduction in Europe, in the 1980s, of strong neoliberal policies implied a critique of the welfare state associated with the idea of high costs and inefficiency (Del Pino & Rubio, 2013). Up till then, the welfare state, of a Keynesian ideological and political nature, had played a decommercialization role, where solidarity and redistribution were the lynchpins of the protection network for citizens (Inza-Bartolome, 2015, p. 391). However, the neoliberal tenets began to exert pressure and direct the responsibility for welfare towards the individual while defending a more businesslike, non-public, management of services previously covered on the basis of principles of non-commercialisation typical of the public sphere (Inza-Bartolome, 2015, p. 386).

In the case of Spain, the setting up of the welfare state was affected by the political situation resulting from Franco's dictatorship. While the welfare state began to take shape in Europe, in Spain, charity and assistance-oriented actions still played a fundamental role (SIIS, 2019; Santos, 2012) and subsequently gave rise to social assistance. Therefore, in the 1980s, social services were still considered to be within the framework of the social security system, and social assistance still existed for people who were excluded from the rest of the protection systems (Aguilar, 2017).

Because of how it developed and for a variety of other reasons (a young system, the diverse competences and institutions, etc.), it could be said that the social services have failed to reach the same level of consolidation as the rest of the systems (Hernandez-Echegaray, 2019; Jaraíz, 2011).

The welfare states and, by extension, social services, as their names suggest, aim at procuring welfare. Esping-Andersen (1993) proposes that welfare needs are satisfied, in the main, by three structures providing welfare and security, the state, the market (employment) and the family, thus forming what he calls the welfare triangle. Authors like Bauman (2000) point out the difficulties that these structures encounter as structures providing security and welfare. As previously mentioned in the introduction, an increasingly less stable and more precarious labour market makes working lives highly uncertain (Aznar & Azorín, 2010). Precariousness is already a feature of the labour market, with the result that it is hard to see how it could act as a provider of security and welfare.

In the second place, the family too is incapable of providing the security and welfare that it has, so far, been able to offer, particularly, in situations of great necessity. Families' economic capacity has dropped considerably (Foessa, 2019), and women's participation in the labour market has meant that the family is losing relevance as a stable structure for providing security and welfare (Moreno, 2002). Linked to this is the fact that individualism has led to primary sources such as networks, the community and, in short, organised society losing their capacity as providers of welfare (Hernández, 2009).

Last of all, the state is increasingly less likely to guarantee social security. The state finds itself in a position in which the regulation of the economy and its capacity to intervene and control appears to have been relegated by the mercantile logic of globalisation. Its forms of intervention are no longer aimed at extending public protection through employment, health and education but rather at making up for the forms of exclusion generated by a highly exclusive labour market (Cabeza, 2006).

In this context, it could be said that, with the development of the welfare state, we can identify different models and orientations in which each one of the former providers has a different relevance. In the case of Spain, just like in Greece, Italy or Portugal, we can speak of the existence of a Mediterranean model, whose main distinguishing feature is the fundamental role of the family as the provider of welfare and security. Moreover, benefits and services are usually linked to labour inclusion. The system is often selective rather than universal, and it has limited powers of redistribution. Consequently, the impact on society is the reproduction of social inequalities (Moreno & Mari-Klose, 2013).

Social services are not alien to the major advent of neoliberal policies which, if anything, have been more present in a context of economic crisis (Pastor et al., 2019). In this regard, some studies point out that social workers, being the main professionals in social services, have gone from exercising their profession based on Marxist/Socialist ideologies in which state intervention was extensive and had greater responsibility to ideologies of a more neoliberal nature (Boryczko, 2020) and thus promoting the responsibility of the individual in their own welfare while reducing the state's role as provider. Therefore, and according to these studies,

neoliberal tendencies appear to be weakening the power of social services as an agent of change and influence in social policies (Lazar et al., 2018).

In this respect, the creation of social services has undoubtedly been marked by the political situation. Non-consolidation of the system (a young system, the diverse competences and institutions, etc.) means that the social services find it hard to define their object (Jaraíz, 2011; Aguilar, 2017; Fantova, 2017), the population with which social services work. Despite it being outlined explicitly in legal frameworks, there are doubts about whether these social services have the necessary features to be defined as a system (Arrieta, 2019; Roldán, 2009). The latest laws concerning social services state that the latter are comparable to all other protection systems; they are universal and, therefore, for all citizens. Nevertheless, when you analyse the profile of those being assisted by social services, what you see are mainly people with a low income, people who are more vulnerable or people occupying the weakest links in the social classes. This implies that the work of the professionals in the sector is an exercise in covering the basic needs of a specific type of population and turns the systems itself into something residual rather than universal. This is why, as Fantova points out (2000, p. 2), it is “increasingly irresponsible, inefficient and dangerous for society and for social services to pretend that we can be the ultimate general network”, and, consequently, it is indispensable that we work along the lines of universal social services, from the perspective of the so-called new social risks (Taylor-Gooby, 2013).

In relation to the aforesaid, it is important to highlight the challenge posed by the attention model. It is clear that we can't get rid of the assistance-oriented bias (Arenas, 2016) based on the demand-resource binomial proposed by Zamanillo and Gaitan (1991) which, even today, is constraining social services. This binomial refers to the importance of urgent and timely intervention in order to guarantee the minimum subsistence of families and individuals chiefly by means of interventions concerning the individual and the family, which are provided from the desk in the wake of a need expressed by the person or family. Zamanillo and Nogués explain that this facilitates both neoliberalism and inequality (2020, p. 4). In contrast, it is decisive for social services with performance capability in the welfare state and democratic development to cater to emerging needs and reverse the attention model, by trying to increasingly support and work together with people and groups at the outset, and thus prevent situations from getting worse, resulting in the consolidation of much more proactive and preventive social work (Dominguez & Esperanza, 2017).

It could therefore be said that private management and economic principles have colonised the social services' approach to doing things (Spolander et al., 2016), and social intervention from the perspective of community and the collective has been set aside (Carbonero et al., 2012). On the basis of this idea of commodification, and in reference to the aforesaid, Beck (2006) speaks of processes of individualisation understood as the damage and destruction of primary relational goods. If, from social services, it is understood that the basis of these necessities lies in social problems of a structural nature (social exclusion, inequality, poverty, migratory flows, male violence, etc.), they can hardly be met with purely individual and assistance-oriented answers. Therefore, it is considered fundamental that the collective and

structural dimension of social work be recovered in social services, including an intensification of collective action, putting the general interest above that of individuals and fomenting the participation of all those involved (Rodríguez, 2015).

The absence of this collective perspective and the mainstay of welfare and social protection (not individual) is likewise reflected in citizenry's perception of the system of social services itself. Citizens do not view social services as a universal system or even an essential one, as is the case with the educational or health systems, but rather it is considered as something residual and assistance-based. Incorporating its consideration as a social right for all people is necessary with a view to fomenting social justice, because, above and beyond the support that citizens are given by social services, legitimisation by society is indispensable in order for the system to be maintained, as a public system needs society to consider it their own, something they must defend, look after or claim, if necessary (Santos, 2012).

Following this overview of social services, we can identify at least two of these challenges: (i) a real universalization of the system by defining its purpose; (ii) the evolution from a reactive and individualistic-type model of care to one with a preventive and community nature, not solely attention-oriented (rapid and specific attention); and, last of all, (iii) bringing all citizens closer to social services and making sure the system is understood as a fundamental right.

Moreover, the recent Covid-19 pandemic further ratifies some of the aforementioned challenges, as far social services are concerned. Fantova (2020b) states that this context affords us the opportunity to rethink and reinvent social services with a view to rebuilding the same, and, in the same vein, Zamanillo and Nogués point out that we are at a "crossroads" which is why it is essential that we adopt new approaches which would, for the most part, entail radical changes (2020, p. 8).

Neoliberal ideas and values are undoubtedly a challenge to the values of social work itself (Marthinsen, 2019) and of the actual social services and point to the need to reinvent social services in line with the reality of the challenges being faced.

3 Community and Participation: Vectors of Democracy from Social Services

So far we have argued the importance of social services as a pillar of the welfare state and have identified some of the challenges to be met by these services. In this respect, we propose a strengthening of democracy in this area too. With this in mind, in this section we shall go more deeply into (i) the relevance of a commitment to the community dimension of social work for intervention on the part of social services and (ii) the opportunity to do so by understanding the same from a relational and participatory perspective, as outlined in the different laws concerning social services. We defend a strategy that allows us to advance towards transformative social action based on preventive and community developmental action as opposed to assistance-related approaches (Suirats, 2007).

As already mentioned, diverse studies have highlighted the inadequacies of the current model of Spanish social services (Jaraíz, 2011; Roldán, 2009; Arenas, 2016) due to its lack of capacity to respond to social situations and needs (Navarro, 2015), particularly in contexts of crisis where intervention is even more crucial. In addition, there have been numerous proposals about what some authors have called the reinvention of social services (Fantova, 2020a, 2020b; Zamanillo & Nogués, 2020; Navarro, 2020). All said proposals seek to reinforce the idea of working differently from social services, using different ways of doing things and underlining the importance of doing so from the community perspective: building community, with citizen engagement, in a collective and collaborative fashion, as an indispensable actor in collective social action, making the environment more democratic in their own territories (Blanco, 2019; Pastor, 2017).

As pointed out above, our approach will be implemented from the community perspective of social work, and this dimension will be addressed in the lines below. We could say the main objective of community social work is the “activation of social support and the building of social networks, developing the resources of people and the different environments and social contexts” (Rodríguez & Ferreira, 2018, p. 1). In this respect, as pointed out by Pastor, social engagement is a “defining element” of the community dimension of social work, and the capacity to participate in the community is fundamental for human development itself (2004, p. 107).

This community dimension of social work focuses on its capacity to build social citizenship (Gimeno-Monterde & Alamo-Candelaria, 2018) while insisting on inclusiveness, deliberation and proximity as elements contributing to forms of citizenship and community qualified to build their own future (Pastor, 2004, p. 132). The idea of social citizenship, capable of defining and building their future reality, comes from reaffirming the importance of participation, of working with the community rather than for or in the community (Marchioni, 2004 or Pastor, 2015).

In this approach, the relational dimension plays a significant role in its potential capacity to remedy social inequality and social injustice and help establish that participating through community networks helps reverse certain situations as well as forms of exclusion and social injustice (Morales-Villena & Mestre, 2020, p. 1) As for the community’s capacity for prevention, Fantova (2017) states that the greater the social capital and relational network, the lower the likelihood of reaching a situation of social exclusion, as primary relations are the key source of social protection. Indeed, Rodríguez and Ferreira’s work shows the importance of intervention using social networks and the need for an “orientation towards empowerment” as a strategy for generating forms of full citizenship (2018, p. 1).

On the basis of the above, we can infer that municipal level and primary attention are the closest space of reference for developing intervention practices and community work (Llobet, 2004; Carbonero et al., 2012). Therefore, local social services, being the gateway to social services, are considered those closest to people. Consequently, they are a privileged observation point for doing research on, and working together with, citizens, for exercising countervailing citizen power and having an impact both socially and politically, on the ways to build sufficient

political agency. The local setting is key for the encounter between the political class and citizens and affords a privileged context for developing social policies with a direct impact on citizens' well-being (Rodríguez, 2015).

In this local setting, we place the primary attention of social services whose principles of universality, equality and equity comprise the opportunity for developing community perspective. On the other hand, at a higher level and in the legislative sphere, the different Autonomous Community laws on social services include citizen engagement as one of its pillars (Alemán, 2010) and explicitly advocate for the community approach or community care, generically understood as the capacity to be able to understand and look after people in their own environment (Fantova, 2014, p. 104). From our viewpoint, we understand the community dimension as a continuum, *community continuum*. At one end, we find the said community approach or community care as the lowest sense of the community dimension, whereas at the other end, we find "pure" community social work representing the most profound version of community development, the one defended by authors like Marchioni (2004) or Pastor (2015). The main difference between the two extremes of the *continuum* would be engagement, as, in the second, it is indispensable. Consistent with this idea, we propose the term *community intensification*, as a perspective that would consist in progressing as far as possible in the *continuum* towards "pure" community social work or the more community-oriented dimension of social work, deeply rooted in the idea of engagement.

It is a question of considering the community as a political subject, a stakeholder in the social action of a given territory. Collective interests are put before the interests of the individual, and the community itself, with all its particularities, is the main resource in the face of any difficult situation (Marchioni, 2004). Starting from this premise implies recognising the challenge of recovering community and granting it power in terms of governance, the development of community projects, fomenting people's participation and generating projects that actually improve the reality of the different environments, neighbourhoods and spaces in which people live (Zamanillo & Nogués, 2020).

Community intensification from social services requires the authorities and community to work together, and, to this end, barriers between what is political, technical and social need to be overcome as a premise for developing processes of participatory community action (Blas & Ibarra, 2006, p. 41).

In addition, it calls for a clear technical and political commitment by municipal social services with respect to increased financial investment and to admitting their relevance and importance as a true pillar of the welfare state (Santos, 2012). Community intensification likewise implies directing efforts to coordination and common work with society, the people who make up the community, bodies in the third social sector, social movements, neighbour association movements, etc. The people who are part of the community are the main resource of the more community-based work because they foment citizens' active commitment to collective welfare, the promotion of rights, denunciation and, in short, social transformation (Escartín, 2012).

Unlike the current social work that characterises social service practice, more critical social work calls for greater social commitment, with values such as social justice, solidarity or equity. The consideration of the structural and systemic nature of social problems (Velasco, 2019) requires an understanding that the transformation of the same entails a collective rather than an individual consideration of political agency (Carbonero et al., 2012).

Indeed, the context deriving from the pandemic offers us an opportunity to reaffirm, and focus on, the relevance of community approaches. In recent months, we have witnessed increased solidarity, articulation, self-organisation and self-management in neighbourhoods. Social and community systems have worked like a network, and, when faced with situations of vulnerability, they have played a responsible role, becoming essential agents of social action in neighbourhoods: “The neighbours’ response highlights the need to recover certain personal and family links that had been replaced by impersonal and professional business relations. And social services are an excellent stage on which to try to connect all contributions made by the community in which the social action they are entrusted with is carried out” (Zamanillo & Nogués, 2020, p. 6).

As Rodríguez points out, for social services to intervene in problems of a structural nature, such as poverty, citizens must be involved, and civil society must be strengthened, as it has the capacity for community action everywhere (2015, p. 6). In this respect, the commitment to intensified community engagement can help overcome the challenges outlined in the foregoing section. In the first place, it allows us to defend social services that go beyond welfare-oriented action based on mitigating individual situations of vulnerability or exclusion, in order to turn its gaze to the whole of the community and try to contribute to a true universalisation and normalisation of social services. Similarly, it implies, unlike the individualism that characterises our societies, relational work, a change to a more proactive and collective attention model, to ways of intervention aimed at social cohesion and solidarity between people. Last of all, in the strategy of intensified community engagement, the community is considered a political subject, and from that starting premise, in the face of the weakening of the welfare triangle, it is likewise conceived as a structure providing welfare and security, to complement the rest.

4 The Case of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country

In this section, we shall provide a brief overview of the Basque system of social services. Our aim is to try and describe the presence and development of the community dimension in the current social service system of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country. The objective is to bring this debate closer to a given reality, with a view to identifying the challenges faced by the Basque system of social services in matters relating to intensified community engagement.

When we look at the opportunities that the Basque system of social services generates in relation to intensifying community engagement, Act 12/2008 concerning Social Services clearly stands out as one of the most important. Apart from presenting social services as a subjective right of a universal nature, said law clearly advocates the community care model as a key element in care procedure. Among the law's principles are concepts of interest for the community such as universality, equality, equity, proximity, prevention, integration, normalisation, coordination and cooperation or citizen engagement.

Defence of the community is envisaged as a condition for access by the population to the exercise of citizenship, promotion of social justice and work on the causes of social exclusion; and it does so by recognizing, in its explanatory memorandum, the need for collaboration with the third sector:

Promotion of the organised participation of the very people affected, the design of spaces of cooperation and coordination between systems (social and health care, socio-occupational, social and residential, social and educational, social and legal, social and cultural and others) and the development of a social policy that allows access by all the population to full citizenship, the promotion of social justice and tackling the structural causes of exclusion. (Law 12/2008)

Moreover, the law is developed through different tools such as the portfolio decree (Basque Government, 2015), the strategic plan for social services and the map of social services (Basque Government, 2016). All of them include and explicitly support engagement, the community model, governance and cooperation with other systems so that it could be said that the main legal and theoretical frameworks of the Basque system of social services consistently include references to participation and the community, making the latter a direct commitment of the actual social service system.

Additionally, the data offered by the Basque Government's Statistics on Social Services and Social Action (OEE-Basque Government, 2018) can help us appreciate the practical development of this community outlook, at least as regards (i) the services and benefits offered by social services, (ii) the expenditure made and (iii) the personnel who work in the system. We shall only refer to some of the relevant data that helps provide some context, as a deeper analysis would be overly complex.

First of all, regarding the services and resources used by social services, data on the home help service, understood as one of the services with the strongest community-based approach as well as with the greatest proximity as far as the people assisted are concerned, showed a continuous decline up to 2014, though, in 2016, the figures were more similar to the best ones recorded in the series (those corresponding to 2012, with 7.2 persons per one thousand residents assisted). In a context of an ageing population, there has been a decrease in the scope and intensity of the service: although the number of elderly people has risen and, consequently, the number of dependent people too, the service has failed to grow (OEE- Basque Government, 2018). In consequence, the scope and intensity of the service with the system's strongest community-oriented approach (the lowest link in the *community continuum*) have shrunk. On the other hand, among the services and benefits offered are old people's homes, day centres, home help services, telecare, social emergency

services and help, being as they are essential services, but with a clear emphasis on assistance or care. The main resource for carrying out work with a community dimension in social services are the actual social workers, who are not even mentioned as a resource or service, a glaring absence in the strategy for fomenting community included in the regulatory frameworks.

Secondly, with regard to the outlay, it could be said that 50% of public expenditure in social services is made by the regional governments of the different territories, 30% by the Basque Government and only 10% by local authorities. Furthermore, since the community model was first promoted in 2008, the numbers have changed, and expenditure by the regional governments and Basque Government has risen by more than 100% and 70%, respectively, whereas that of the local authorities has dropped from 16% to 10% (OEE- Basque Government, 2018). Of this public expenditure, municipal expenses account for 12.5%, an amount that has dropped by almost 2 percentage points since 2012. If, as mentioned above, the municipal sphere is considered the point of reference for the community dimension, it is hard to imagine how it can develop in line with what is laid down in the legal and theoretical frameworks, without financial outlay or investment in technical personnel.

Lastly, in relation to the people working in social services, we can observe an increase in numbers of almost 25% since 2006 (OEE-Basque Government, 2018). However, personnel in municipal social services, a reference in the development of the community perspective, has hardly grown in numbers since Act 12/2008 (OEE-Basque Government, 2018) was passed, so, although it may be a firm commitment in the law, the fact that professional resources have not been increased in the sphere where it is to be implemented hinders its progress and consolidation.

Moreover, in the Ararteko's (Basque Ombudsman) report (2016) on the challenges and threats identified, special emphasis is put on those that are related to the weakness of the community perspective of Basque municipal social services.

In the first place, reference is made to the need for collaborating when providing services that are considered fundamental to guarantee social cohesion and people's quality of life. The report points out the importance of boosting self-organisation initiatives in the community making up public social action and which are only feasible at local level (2016, p. 171–172). Similarly, among the proposals included in the report is promotion of the active participation of the people in the services and in the processes of design and development of municipal policy concerning social service primary care, by prioritising citizen engagement. As for the programmes and services to be developed by municipal social services, community development and mediation programmes are contemplated (p. 174), while emphasis is placed on the fact that (i) community work (complementing individual work) affords the possibility of participation to a significant part of the people making up the community; (ii) the community approach implies managing diversity; (iii) one works from the community perspective, with the aim to strengthen community relations and participatory dynamics; and, last of all, (iv) the community approach includes concepts like proximity or networking in the collective imagination (2016, p. 175).

Last of all, the report refers to the fact that community development programmes help contribute to citizens' social and economic development through their

revitalisation, reinforcement and the creation of self-help networks or other social and/or economic initiatives, with the aid of collective and cooperative projects (Ararteko, 2016).

This brief analysis of the community perspective in Basque social services reveals its weakness in practice, despite the major development contemplated in its regulations. In any case, in the face of the insufficient response of social policies, the global context would appear to indicate a rediscovery of self-managed initiatives and community and relational links in their creation and development (SIIS, 2019, p. 6). In the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country too, we can appreciate different experiences of community self-management and new forms of voluntary action, experiences in which, in spheres such as the one related to the elderly, there is a commitment to “co-creation for designing community services” (SIIS, 2019, p. 7). Thus, along the lines of this work, in this last year marked by the pandemic, we have witnessed the emergence of forms of joint and community action between citizens and social services at municipal level¹ (Naiz, 2020).

5 A Final Reflection/Conclusions

This work has discussed the need to explore the democratisation of social services and the tools or perspectives required to do so. Our analysis has helped us conclude that social services have great difficulty in meeting their objectives of social justice and transformation. Consequently, we believe a commitment to a deepening of democracy in the sphere of social services is necessary. There is need for a strategy based on the participatory, community aspect, one which is in fact present in the regulatory principles and objectives that characterise these services.

Accordingly, our proposal is based on the concept of intensified community care as a strategy for contributing satisfactorily to democratisation. Furthermore, it was our intention to demonstrate that the context of crisis arising from the pandemic makes it even more urgent to insist on the fact that only with sufficient community and political perspective in social services can we go forward with building and strengthening democracy.

The worsening of inequalities which is likewise a reflection of the social service system’s own shortcomings leads us to look at the role of social services in the development of a form of democracy based on social justice and the common good. The importance of an intervention still focused on individual situations and problems, in a reactive and care-oriented way, makes it highly unlikely that the community dimension will ever be the central point from which to foment deep

¹ Interview with the mayor of Errenteria in NAIZ newspaper, which covers the work carried out jointly by the social services and the different community players in the town. In: Naiz irratia. 2020. (April 6). Esku hartz epublikoaren eta komunitatearen ekimenari esker ari gara honi eant-zuten” Aizpea Otaegi Errenteriako alkateari elkarrizketa. https://irratia.naiz.eus/eu/info_irratia/20200406/eskuhartze-epublikoaren-eta-komunitatearen-ekimenari-esker-ari-gara-egoerari-honi-erantzuten. Accessed 20 April 2020.

social transformation. Thus, more and more people are defending a more relational intervention by social services, in a more proactive manner and with networking as a condition for social transformation.

In this respect, insisting on the need for an intensification of the community dimension in social services implies being able to make the necessary changes and reinvention for a professional practice focusing on the opportunities offered by this channel to democracy. On the one hand, due to the proximity of the intervention and professional practice, heavily focused on territory and communities, a necessary step would be to share a reflection on the needs and the work for developing already existing resources in the community with the people affected. On the other hand, it is advisable due to the community's leading role in articulating forms of community participation aimed at building an active social citizenry, present at decision-making process.

The brief and still exploratory introduction of the data referring to the Basque system of social services reveals that the importance granted to the community in the legal sphere is not sufficiently reflected in professional practice and in the conditions referring to expenditure and adapting to context which they clearly imply. On the other hand, a review of the documents reveals that a view of social services as the central player for the development of the welfare state and democracy is beginning to take hold in theory and in academe as well as in all the experiences which are globally incorporating the community dimension. It will therefore be quite a challenge to go on exploring the channels which this community dimension of the social work discipline implies for the greater democratization of social services.

In this regard, and on the basis of the community intensification approach, progressing towards community social work based on participation would seem urgent and a priority: power sharing, making people participants in their own lives and building fairer and more democratic territories in cooperation and collaboration, where relations are social networks and, in short, where more and better welfare is achieved.

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Participation, Immigration and Subjective Perception of Integration in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country



Arkaitz Fullaondo  and Gorka Moreno 

Abstract Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Basque society has been undergoing an intensive process of ethnocultural diversification, a consequence of the latest international migratory flows. For the Basque Country, these flows imply a new migratory cycle which, as on former occasions, helps further diversify an already diverse society. From the point of view of a cohesive society, the integration of these new migrants is a key element. What is the role of social and political participation in the integration process? This paper aims at providing an answer to the question. There may be a variety of forms and models for defining what is understood as integration. However, it is generally agreed that participation is a major factor in this integration process. This consensus is based on the fact that participation is a fundamental, democratic element which is related to political and civil rights, the community system and a society's citizens. From the democratic viewpoint, having immigrants participate is, therefore, a fundamental aspect.

In this work, we intend to analyse the relation between the participation of people of foreign origin residing in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (CAPV) and their subjective perception of integration. To this end, we based our work on the Basque Government's Survey of the Foreign Immigrant Population (EPIE), a survey that allows us to analyse the subjective perception of integration of people of foreign origin depending on the different forms of engagement and their sociodemographic and migratory profile. The findings helped show the existence of a positive relation between participation and the perception of integration. Furthermore, it was likewise observed that the different participation profiles identified vary depending on the nature of the organisation in which they participate, the migratory stage and their socio-economic characteristics.

Keywords Participation · Immigration · Diversity · Integration

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1 Introduction

Social participation in a society is a crucial element for the integration or exclusion of the people participating in it (Subirats, 2004). Similarly, participation is a core dimension of democratic practice. However, its definition is diverse and depends on the theoretical position (Martinez, 2018). From the academic point of view, the studies on participation are based on the analysis of the regulatory dimension (participatory procedures and a willingness to redistribute power), on the consequences of participation (empowerment and increased social capital), on the technical design and the implementation of participation devices (deliberative and participatory processes) and on the study of participation from the sectoral perspective (participation in terms of gender, sustainability or intersectionality, among others) (Martinez, 2018). With this multidimensional context, participation and immigration can be studied from a variety of dimensions, for example, the question of the right to vote and stand for election (regulatory dimension), the relation between participation and social integration (consequences of participation) or a sector analysis of immigration and participation.

In any case, it is widely recognised that participation is a key element in the immigrant integration process, as it indicates, among other things, the development of citizenry as a whole (De Lucas, 2007), the expansion of rights (Schuck, 2018) and the reinforcement of more integrated and cohesive societies (Odmalm, 2005) in contexts of diversity (Kymlicka, 1995). However, the role or importance it is supposed to have may differ depending on the definition given to the concept of integration. Indeed, the concept of integration is used recurrently in migratory studies while being one of the main objectives of public policies in receiving countries. However, there is no consensus on the exact definition of the concept of integration (Godenau et al., 2014), and neither is there on the importance of participation in the integration process.

The analysis of the processes of social and political participation of immigrants has become increasingly important in migratory studies since the 1960s (Rex et al., 1987) and, in recent years, internationally (Zapata et al., 2013; Vermeulen, 2010; Martiniello, 2005). Academic studies in Spain on migration also reflect this reality and have dealt with the subject, particularly given the boom and development in migratory flows in the last 25 years (Pérez-Caramés, 2018). In this area, above all, there has been an analysis of issues associated with political participation on the one hand, with emphasis on aspects like access to the vote and standing for elections and electoral participation (González Ferrer, 2013), and, on the other, social and political participation through civil society associations and organisations (Moya, 2005; Aparicio & Tornós, 2010; Lacomba & Aboussi, 2017).

Starting from this focus on the relation between participation and migratory processes, in this paper, we shall try to analyse the existing relation between the political and social participation of people of foreign origin residing in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (CAPV) and their process of integration in Basque society. The methodology used is based on a quantitative-type analysis of

the Survey of the Foreign Immigrant Population (EPIE) which the Basque Government has been carrying out every 4 years since 2010. This survey is based on a sample of 2200 persons and their homes and includes information on the foreign as well as the national population of foreign origin or the naturalised population.

Based on this survey, we shall analyse the political and social participation of the people of foreign origin in relation to, on the one hand, their participation in immigrant or immigrant support associations, neighbours' associations, trade unions and political parties and, on the other, their participation in electoral processes. In this respect, we focus the analysis on the degree of participation as well as on the profile of the people participating, depending on their socio-economic, citizenship, migratory and sociodemographic characteristics. Similarly, we shall analyse the relation between participation and the subjective perception of integration.

2 Participation, Immigration and Perception of Integration

For many years, immigrant workers have been considered *temporary guests* in their receiving countries and not potential citizens who are expected to be politically active; that is to say, their role in society has been considered limited exclusively to production and work (Martiniello, 2005). For this reason, the degree of importance of the political and social participation of immigrants in the integration process will vary depending on whether they are considered citizens or not with the right to participate in society and, consequently, likewise, the importance of the participation in integration policies (Ahokas, 2010).

With regard to integration, participation is one of the four dimensions of immigrants' political incorporation in receiving societies, along with the recognition of rights, identification with the host society and the adoption of democratic values and standards (Zapata et al., 2013; Martiniello, 2005). In this regard, when speaking of the political integration of immigrants, three elements need to be considered, namely, first of all, the degree of self-identification with the political system of the host country; secondly, the degree of active participation through voting and participation in the public sphere; and, thirdly, the perception of feeling heard by the authorities (Zapata et al., 2013). Along the same line, Entzinger points out that "one of the basic principles of democracy implies that all members of a political community have a share in the decision-making processes that decide on that community, its governance and its future" (1999:9). In this respect, one of the ways of relating participation with the immigrant integration process is based on their degree of social participation linked to the decision-making processes (Entzinger, 1999).

The degree of political and social participation of immigrants is conditioned by the characteristics of the immigrants themselves as well as by the receiving society's context. In a host context where migratory and integration policies generate spaces of opportunity for immigrants' social and political participation, the degree of participation will tend to be greater. We are referring, among other aspects, to participation programmes, as well as discourses, issues which are the subject of

consultation and decision and access to conventional (elections, political organisations, participation processes, etc.) and non-conventional participation (mobilisation, strikes, demonstrations, civil disobedience, etc.) (Zapata et al., 2013). Thus, we can see how this host context is defined, on the one hand, by regulatory and institutional elements and, on the other, by society itself, by its individuals as well as by the collective, depending on said society's degree of inclusion of diversity in its social realities and processes. With regard to the immigrants' characteristics, diverse studies have shown that the immigrant's social origin and their sociodemographic profile, such as prior political socialisation, social capital, the language, the form of migration, length of stay and the socio-economic situation in the receiving country, have an impact on participation (Ruedin, 2016; Zapata et al., 2013).

Moreover, as we have already pointed out, participation is one of the factors influencing the integration process. The variety in ways to measure integration is considerable, with one of them being the subjective perception that the immigrants themselves have of their degree of integration. This indicator shows the result of the immigrant's life experience in the host society, a life experience that the immigrants themselves evaluate by taking into consideration, among other questions, the opportunities, obstacles, rejection and support received while setting up their life project in the receiving society and on which their own prior expectations and their personal experience prior to the migratory process likewise impact (Amit & Riss, 2014). Therefore, it is an indicator which, rather than just measuring the degree of objective integration and substantiated by data or indicators, helps us understand the extent to which the immigrant feels integrated in our society (González, 2014).

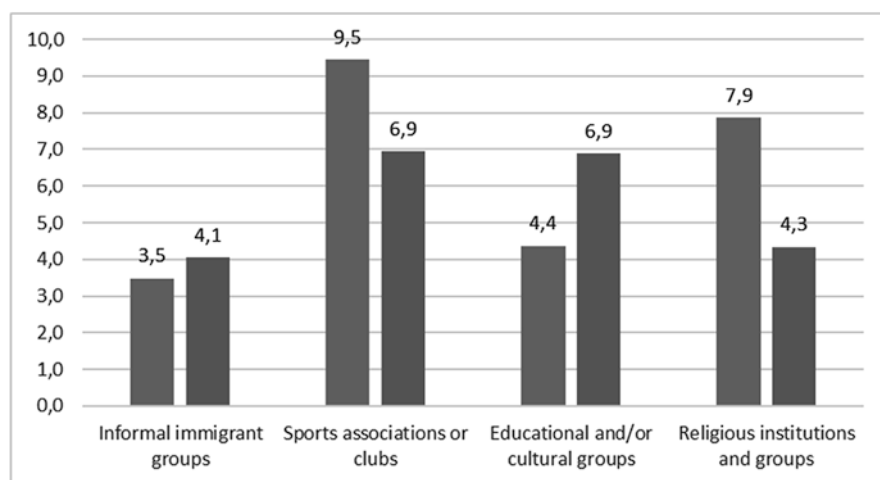
3 Participation in the Associative Network

The associative network is an element that characterises contemporary societies. With a great range of types, forms, functions and characteristics, it plays an important role in articulating the community and is an essential factor of its social capital (Fernandez & Cano, 2018). Associations and organisations for culture, leisure, sports clubs, religious bodies, educational groups, etc. are spaces for social participation, not so much linked to the decision-making-related participation which Entzinger (1999) speaks of but rather to the social muscle on which a major part of society's community and social life is structured and, therefore, where spaces for social participation and social relations are generated. A society with a broad and diverse associative network is linked to an active and full community life. In this respect, from the point of view of the integration processes of the immigrant population, it is important to know the degree of social participation of the collective in the associative network (Vecina, 2010).

The EPIE does not allow us to compare the degree of participation of the population of foreign origin with the degree of participation existing in the whole of Basque society. This comparison can be made with the data from the Survey on Social Capital carried out by the Basque Institute of Statistics (Eustat). Based on this

statistical operation, the Eustat can calculate the indicator of participation in associations and can differentiate said indicator depending on the origin of the population. The results for 2017 reveal a similar degree of participation in associations in the case of the overall population and that of foreign origin. To be precise, 98.3% of the overall population have a low degree of participation, 1.6% a medium degree and 0.1% a high degree, whereas in the case of the population of foreign origin, 98.7% have a low degree of participation, 1.3% a medium degree and 0% a high degree.

Focusing on the results provided by the EPIE, in Graph 1, we can appreciate the percentage of people of foreign origin over 16 years who say they participate in different kinds of associations and bodies.¹ If we look at the data from 2010, we can see that participation in the associative network occurred, in the main, in sports associations (9.5%) or in religious bodies (7.9%), followed by educational and/or cultural groups (4.4%) and informal immigrant groups (3.5%). We can therefore appreciate how the participation of immigrants arriving during the first migratory wave at the beginning of the twenty-first century was concentrated mainly in the sports and religious associative network.



Graph 1 % of population of foreign origin >16 years residing in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country and participating in the associative network. (Source: EPIE. Compiled by the authors)

¹ With regard to the migratory context, the data from 2010 represent the collective of foreign origin that arrived in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country during the first migratory wave, which got underway at the beginning of the twenty-first century as a consequence of the building boom. With regard to the economic and social situation, they represent the first years of the 2008 economic downturn. Lastly, 2018 was a context of migratory growth related to the recovery from the economic slump and the return to economic growth, though far from the economic expansion and welfare indicators prior to 2008.

In 2018, the results reveal a change in the type of participation. There is greater participation in educational and cultural groups (6.9%) and in informal immigrant organisations (4.1%) and a drop in participation in sports associations (6.9%) and in religious bodies (4.3%). Thus, we can appreciate how once migrants have settled and established themselves, participation is affected, the social network changes and moves, above all, to cultural and educational spaces and areas where the immigrants themselves can relate. As for the drop in the numbers involved in religious bodies, it may be associated with a greater degree of integration, as, in the initial stages of the migration process, particularly in the case of immigrants of certain origins, religious bodies provide support and assistance.

Do all immigrants participate equally irrespective of their migratory and social characteristics, or are there any differences? The question is pertinent. Though there is a tendency to see the collective as a homogeneous whole or, at best, differentiated by their origin and their cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics, the truth is that the immigrant population is a highly diverse population group with internal differences as regards gender, age structure, length of stay, socio-economic situation or legal situation, among other variables.

Table 1 shows the findings that help outline the profile of people over the age of 16 of foreign origin participating in each type of association and identifies several differences. First of all, in order to answer the question posed above, if we compare the result of each variable for the total population of foreign origin with that of the people who say they participate, we can appreciate a series of specific characteristics in participation and the fact that the characteristics vary depending on the type of association in which they participate.

Generally speaking, based on the results from 2018, the participation profile of the immigrants who participate in informal organisations and religious bodies is more orientated to the quest for aid for reasons of necessity, associated with the migratory stage and their socio-economic situation. These types of groups and entities usually tend to be spaces for intragroup and co-ethnic community assistance, where immigrants in need go to broaden their social network and receive informal support. In the case of religious bodies, there is an added element of community religious practice. In the case of informal immigrant organisations, the profile is mainly people in financial difficulties (61.3%); in a precarious legal situation (10.9% illegal and 17.9% temporary residence); an average length of stay less than the standard (10.7 years), on average; younger (38.3); and the population of African origin and the rest of the world. In the case of the religious bodies, there is a strikingly high percentage of people in financial difficulties (71.7%), an average length of stay less than what is the standard (11.4 years), low to medium educational level and with origins concentrated in the rest of South America, the Maghreb and Romania and other eastern EU countries.

With regard to those participating in cultural, educational and sports associations, the profile presented is, to a large extent, one of a settled immigrant who seeks to engage in the social network though they are not necessarily in any particular situation of need. These types of bodies are likewise part of the community network and can serve as spaces of assistance. However, they are more transversal, open and

Table 1 Profile of the population of foreign origin >16 residing in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country and participating in the associative network by migratory, socio-economic and demographic variables (% vertical)

	2010					2018				
	Informal immigrant groups	Sports club	Grupos Educational groups	Religious bodies	Total	Informal immigrant groups	Sports Educational club	Cultural groups	Bodies	Total
Gender										
	62.2	62.8	37.6	46.1	46.8	51.2	56.2	45.2	35.4	42.7
	37.8	37.2	62.4	53.9	53.2	48.8	43.8	54.8	64.6	57.3
Age (average)	36.1	33.2	35.9	38.2	35.6	38.3	37.6	40.5	41.4	41.3
Educational level	9.4	3.0	5.9	11.6	8.3	14.3	7.0	6.0	16.3	12.2
	21.0	20.2	10.6	28.6	26.7	23.4	15.0	18.4	23.7	26.3
	35.9	31.9	32.1	29.3	35.9	24.8	31.1	28.7	38.6	30.5
	6.9	9.3	5.2	11.1	10.3	16.3	20.7	14.7	10.1	15.2
	26.8	35.5	46.3	19.5	18.8	21.1	26.1	32.2	11.4	15.8

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Geographical area	2010						2018					
	Informal immigrant groups	Sports club	Grupos Educational groups	Religious bodies	Total	Informal immigrant groups	Sports Educational club	Cultural groups	Bodies	Total		
Western EU	1.6	15.9	12.9	7.0	12.5	3.8	15.1	13.2	3.8	8.4		
Romania and other Eastern EU	1.6	5.2	6.1	8.5	10.5	5.0	6.4	6.9	12.5	9.8		
Maghreb	15.8	9.8	9.4	26.2	13.8	14.2	10.9	12.3	24.4	15.1		
Argentina, Chile, Uruguay	4.6	9.5	10.1	3.4	4.9	2.2	8.4	.6.7	2.1	4.1		
Colombia, Ecuador, Perú	14.0	14.2	10.6	9.6	18.9	7.8	19.4	24.5	14.8	17.3		
Bolivia	14.1	14.5	13.4	6.8	7.4	9.9	6.6	5.5	6.4	6.5		
Paraguay	6.4	3.8	1.8	3.0	3.2	2.1	1.3	1.5	2.9	3.5		
Brazil, Venezuela, Dominican R.	4.2	8.4	6.7	11.2	8.3	8.7	8.3	13.9	4.8	7.8		
Rest of Latin America	4.0	7.8	7.1	5.3	5.7	7.6	9.6	5.3	16.8	9.8		
China	1.6	1.3	1.6	1.1	2.6	1.9	3.1	0.8	0.7	2.3		
Senegal	14.6	2.0	0.9	4.6	1.9	11.9	2.2	0.6	0.7	2.5		
Rest of Africa	12.7	2.3	13.0	7.6	4.3	11.0	3.6	2.2	4.9	5.6		
Rest of the World	4.7	5.4	6.4	5.6	5.9	14.1	5.1	6.6	5.2	7.4		
Length stay-yrs. CAPV (average)	7.1	9.0	9.5	8.6	8.5	10.7	13.7	15.8	11.4	12.8		

Legal situation	Spanish nationality	8.6	25.1	15.1	16.4	18.4	35.9	44.3	48.1	39.1	37.4
	Permanent residence	45.5	45.1	50.9	44.2	52.6	34.4	41.7	42.0	46.0	48.6
	Temporary residence	28.9	19.2	26.6	27.4	21.7	17.9	10.2	5.0	11.1	8.3
	Illegal	17.1	10.6	7.4	12.0	7.4	10.9	3.7	4.2	3.9	5.1
Financial difficulties	Yes	75.6	56.1	61.9	64.6	57.1	61.3	44.1	41.7	71.7	55.0
	No	24.4	43.9	38.1	35.4	42.9	38.7	55.9	58.3	28.3	45.0
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: EPIE. Compiled by the authors

less defined. On the basis of the results from 2018, in relation to sports associations, a larger number of men participate (56.2%), whereas in the educational/cultural groups, women are more common (54.8%). However, in the case of the remaining variables, the results show greater similarity. In both cases, the educational level is medium to high, and the origins are predominantly western EU, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic. With respect to the length of stay, the average number of years is greater than the total, which shows that they have been living longer in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, a fact that coincides with their legal situation which reveals that the percentage of participants in this type of association or group with Spanish nationality is above 44%. Lastly, with regard to the economic situation, the majority state that they do not have economic problems.

When compared with the data from 2010, the profiles reveal some changes, but their main characteristics have not changed. In the case of the informal immigrant organisations, we can see an increase in participation by women and a drop in the number of people of Latin American origin who participate. With regard to the religious bodies, the main change can be appreciated in the emergence of the population from Romania and from other eastern EU countries as a significant population and in a major increase in the number of people who have acquired Spanish nationality. In the case of sports associations and educational and cultural groups, there have been few changes in the profile, except for the significant increase in the number of women participating, the improved legal situation and their economic situation.

4 Political and Social Participation

Having analysed social participation in the associative network, in this section, we shall focus on the political participation of the population of foreign origin. Undoubtedly, participation in the receiving society's political life is a fundamental aspect in the integration process from the point of view of democracy (Entzinger, 1999). Including immigrants in political decision-making and in the design of policies on which social life develops is a fundamental aspect of democracy. However, despite its importance, their participation is conditioned and limited, among other factors, by the legal conditions for access to the right to vote and stand for election and by factors inherent to the migratory process such as the migratory stages and the prioritising of material questions over political affairs by the immigrant population (Adamson, 2007; Zapata et al., 2013; OSCE, 2017).

There are different forms and ways for political participation to take place: individually, collectively and in an organised fashion by means of regulated and institutional channels of participation, trade union, political and social movements, etc. However, within this diversity in forms of political participation, the common element is a shared objective to have an impact on political decision-making, either directly by holding political power or indirectly through strategies countervailing power and pressure in an attempt to influence and transform society (Soysal, 1999).

Political participation of the different social groups that make up a society is a fundamental aspect for social cohesion itself, in so far as their participation implies finding a space for their interests and needs in political decision-making and in the design and implementation of public policies (Subirats, 2004). Nevertheless, although participation is a condition, participation alone does not guarantee that these interests will end up being represented in political decisions. Consequently, political participation (understood in the broad sense, beyond the mere involvement in the institutions and elections) being a key factor in a country's political decision-making depends on the degree of participatory and democratic development of said country, as well as on its participatory and democratic culture. Implication in society's political participation depends, to a large extent, on the existence or not of a culture of participation and on the existence of effective channels for its implementation (González, 2011).

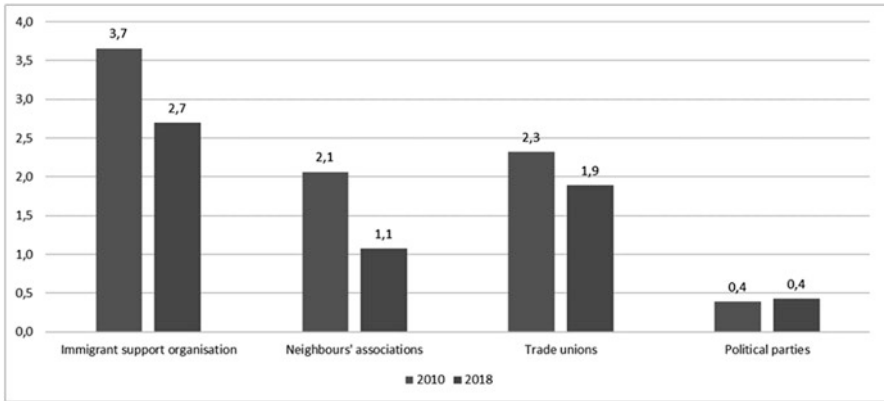
Exactly what degree of political participation do the people of foreign origin have in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, and what is their profile? In this context, it is relevant to provide an answer to this question as it can tell us if they participate or not, how they do so, and, above all, it can tell us if there is a specific profile of people of foreign origin who engage in politics in Basque society and also provide us with the profile of the collective that participates to a lesser degree. In order to respond to this question, we shall focus, on the one hand, on the degree of participation in organisations which, because of their mission or nature, are characterised by their desire to influence political spheres or because they are political players, such as immigrant support organisations, neighbours' associations, trade unions and political parties. On the other hand, we shall analyse the participation of people of foreign origin with Spanish nationality in Autonomous Community elections.

4.1 Participation in Political and Social Organisations

Graph 2 shows the percentage of people of foreign origin over 16 years of age who state that they have participated in these organisations. Based on data from 2010, 3.7% have participated in immigrant support organisations, followed by participation in trade unions with 2.3% and neighbours' associations with 2.1%, whereas the degree of participation in political parties, at 0.4%, is almost marginal.

The evolution indicated by 2018 reveals a generalised drop in the degree of participation in these organisations, although the same order is maintained. Participation is still greater in immigrant support organisations (2.7%), followed by participation in trade unions (1.9%), neighbours' associations (1.1%) and political parties (0.4%).

These data reveal that the political participation of the population of foreign origin mainly involves organisations that are concerned with working on and protecting their political and social interests, namely, immigrant support organisations. Secondly, the next space of political participation can be found in the labour sphere, through participation in trade unions, that is, once again a type of organisation that



Graph 2 Participating population of foreign origin >16 residing in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country according to type of organisation (% of the total). (Source: EPIE. Compiled by the authors)

works to guarantee their employment rights. On the other hand, participation tends to be less in organisations where the advocacy goal is more general and is not so centred on the protection of rights, such as neighbours' associations and political parties.

What is the degree of political and social participation of the population of foreign origin in comparison with that of Basque society? The findings of the Basque Community's Survey on Social Capital can help us answer this question. Based on the indicator of political and social participation, we can appreciate that, generally speaking, the population of foreign origin participates to a lesser extent in comparison with the total degree of participation. In both cases, the vast majority reveal a low degree of participation (88.6% of the total population and 93.4% of the population of foreign origin), and, in both cases, the weight of those who reveal a high degree of participation is likewise marginal. The main difference can be found in the medium degree of participation, where 6% of the population of foreign origin is situated as opposed to 10.1% of the overall population.

As for the participants' profile, in the case of participation in socio-political organisations too, we can appreciate differences and similarities between the profiles. However, in this case, we can see how the profile of those participating in immigrant support organisations differs to a greater extent than the rest, whereas the participant's profile in the rest of the organisations is more similar.

In 2018, the profile of the people participating in immigrant support organisations is characterised by a balance between the sexes (although in comparison with the total distribution, this balance suggests a masculinised profile), an average age of 42 years (higher than the total), a medium to high educational level (47.5% with vocational training or higher) and predominantly of African origin (47.4% come from the Maghreb, Senegal or the rest of Africa). With regard to the migratory variable, the average length of stay is 12 years (less than the total), and the legal situation is good, with 80.8% holding a permanent residence permit or Spanish

nationality. Lastly, the majority (63.5%) admit to having financial difficulties. Based on the evolution of the profile since 2010, we can see that there has been a feminisation of participation (the participation of women has grown by 12 percentage points), and the average age and the educational level have risen (those with vocational training or higher is up by 10%). As regards origin, there are no major changes. With respect to the migratory variables, the length of stay has risen, though it is below the total. On the other hand, a significant change can be appreciated with regard to the legal situation. In 2010, 53.5% were illegal or had a temporary residence permit, whereas in 2018, these data showed substantial improvement with a drop to 17.6%. As for their financial situation, the number of people in financial difficulties had dropped by 10.9% (Table 2).

As previously mentioned, in the case of neighbours' associations, trade unions and political parties,² the profiles are quite similar, even though there are some differences. In 2018, neighbours' associations and political parties are characterised by a feminised profile, whereas in the case of the trade unions, it is masculinised. The average age in all three cases is above the overall population, and the most prevalent level of education is the third level (over 30%), except for the trade union profile, where compulsory education is likewise significant. In relation to the origin, in the case of neighbours' associations and political parties, people of European and Latin American origin predominate, whereas in trade unions, people of Latin American and African origin are more numerous. Concerning the migratory variables, for all three profiles, the length of stay is above the total (the average is over 16 years in the three cases), and the legal situation is good, with the percentage of people holding Spanish nationality above 80% in the case of the trade unions and political parties and 92.3% having permanent residence and nationality in the case of neighbours' associations. Lastly, all three profiles are characterised by a majority of people who state they are not in financial difficulties. Regarding 2010, the evolution of the profiles shows some variations, the most noteworthy of which are the increase in participation by women, the greater participation of those of Latin American origin and the improved legal situation of the people participating.

4.2 *Participation in Electoral Processes*

The political participation in electoral processes of people of foreign origin is conditioned by access to citizenship by means of nationality and reciprocity agreements that exist between some states for certain electoral processes. In general, access to nationality and full citizenship is a fundamental element in order to be able to exercise the right to vote and stand for election in all electoral processes (Ruedin, 2016).

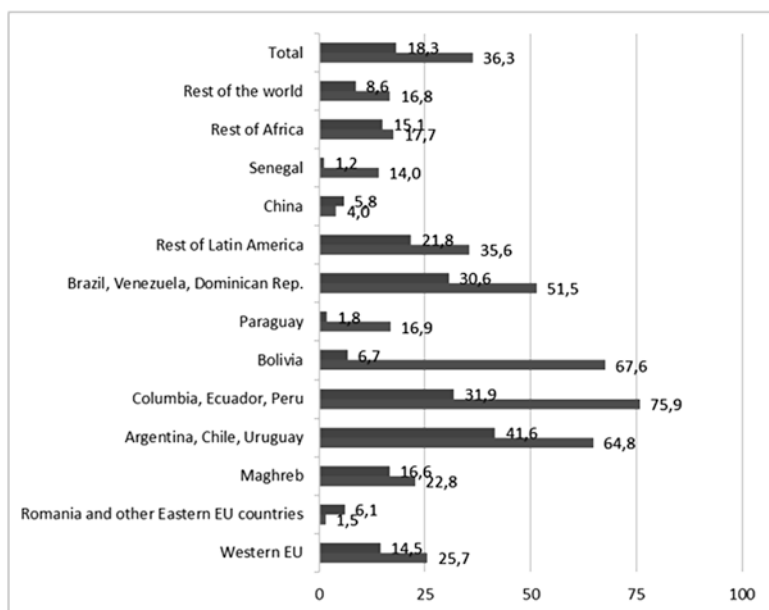
²The results of the profile of the participant in political parties must be approached with great caution due to the low participation and the small sample.

Table 2 Profile of population of foreign origin >16 residing in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country and participating in political and social associations by migratory, socio-economic and demographic variables (% vertical)

	2010					2018				
	Immigrant support organization	Neighbours' associations	Trade Unions	Political parties	Total	Immigrant support organization	Neighbours' associations	Trade unions	Political parties	Total
Gender										
	Male	62.9	54.7	71.9	77.2	46.8	50.9	50.4	38.0	42.7
	Female	37.1	45.3	28.1	22.9	53.2	49.1	49.6	62.0	57.3
Age (average)		36.0	44.5	43.0	43.2	35.6	42.0	45.4	53.7	41.3
Level of studies	No meaningful qualifications	8.7	4.4	8.9	0.0	8.3	12.6	0.0	6.1	12.2
	Compulsory	22.5	23.6	12.2	17.3	26.7	14.2	27.8	5.5	26.3
	Secondary	31.2	32.9	16.0	2.1	35.9	25.9	27.0	0.0	30.5
	VT I/II	9.9	5.9	10.9	33.9	10.3	22.2	14.9	11.0	15.2
	Third-level	27.7	33.2	52.0	46.9	18.8	25.1	30.3	77.3	15.8

Origin	Western EU	2.9	33.1	33.1	0.0	12.5	0.0	20.1	4.5	14.8	8.4
	Romania and other Eastern EU countries	1.6	15.8	9.2	7.7	10.5	8.1	12.6	9.2	10.3	9.8
	Maghreb	20.0	6.5	12.4	30.1	13.8	18.6	11.1	15.3	0.0	15.1
	Argentina, Chile, Uruguay	5.5	1.8	8.0	25.0	4.9	3.7	4.5	1.1	0.0	4.1
	Columbia, Ecuador, Peru	6.4	13.0	14.0	31.5	18.9	5.8	20.8	23.7	21.9	17.3
	Bolivia	10.8	9.6	1.9	3.6	7.4	6.8	0.0	14.6	0.0	6.5
	Paraguay	6.9	0.0	1.4	0.0	3.2	1.9	0.0	2.6	1.6	3.5
	Brazil, Venezuela, Dominican Rep.	6.3	3.4	6.3	0.0	8.3	8.3	6.7	11.4	46.5	7.8
	Rest of Latin America	3.8	5.1	2.6	0.0	5.7	9.6	6.4	5.1	0.0	9.8
	China	1.9	1.2	0.0	0.0	2.6	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.3
	Senegal	17.0	2.1	3.9	2.1	1.9	16.4	0.5	0.0	0.0	2.5
	Rest of Africa	12.5	6.8	7.3	0.0	4.3	12.3	3.7	9.0	0.0	5.6
	Rest of the world	4.5	1.5	0.0	0.0	5.9	7.4	13.5	3.6	5.1	7.4
	Years since they arrived in the Basque Autonomous Community (average)	8.0	14.5	14.9	9.3	8.5	12.0	19.6	16.4	30.6	12.8
Legal status	Spanish nationality	10.5	27.5	36.4	25.0	18.4	38.0	54.9	80.8	94.9	37.4
	Permanent residence	36.0	66.9	58.6	71.4	52.6	42.8	37.4	14.8	5.1	48.6
	Temporary residence	33.4	4.1	4.6	3.6	21.7	9.3	5.9	2.2	0.0	8.3
	Irregular	20.2	1.6	0.4	0.0	7.4	8.3	1.9	2.2	0.0	5.1
Financial difficulties	With difficulties	74.4	37.6	38.3	67.5	57.1	63.5	29.2	41.2	28.8	55.0
	No difficulties	25.6	62.4	61.7	32.7	42.9	36.5	70.8	58.8	71.2	45.0
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: EPIE. Compiled by the authors



Graph 3 Population of foreign origin >18 years with Spanish nationality (%). (Source: EPIE. Compiled by the authors)

In this respect, the legal framework regulating access to nationality is the main factor conditioning the degree of participation of the population of foreign origin. This is the case because the conditions for access differ depending on the country. In some cases, the number of years required to be eligible for legal residence are more and in others less. Broadly speaking, the population from Latin American countries require 2 years of legal residence while the remainder, under current rules, are required to have resided 10 years in the country. Consequently, when analysing and evaluating the degree of participation of people of foreign origin, it is indispensable to know the percentage of people who have obtained Spanish nationality and evaluate their degree of participation based on this element.

In this respect, Graph 3 shows the percentage of population of foreign origin over 18 years who have obtained Spanish nationality. In 2018, 36.3% had obtained Spanish nationality, implying a significant increase with respect to the 18.3% in 2010. Nevertheless, even in 2010, there were notable differences according to origin, and, in 2018, these differences were even greater.

In 2018, the majority of the Latin American origins recorded over 50% having obtained nationality, with countries like Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay recording over 60%. The percentage representing Spanish nationality among the remaining origins is significantly less, 25.7% in the case of western EU, 22.8% for the Maghreb and less than 20% in the rest of cases. Moreover, the evolution in relation to 2010 clearly indicates that the increase in

naturalisations was much greater in the case of Latin American origins and to a far lesser extent in relation to other origins. Thus, we can appreciate that the population of Latin American origin predominate among the population of foreign origin with the right to vote.

With respect to the degree of participation, the electoral processes held in recent years have recorded the low participation of the immigrant collective – of those who have the right to vote and stand for election (Godenau et al., 2014) – and they are clearly underrepresented in the institutions. The findings of the EPIE reveal similar results. In 2010, only 34% of people of foreign origin over 18 years of age and with Spanish nationality admitted to having participated in Autonomous Community elections (the type of elections we shall analyse), and, in 2018, the percentage rose, but only to 41.6%.

The results in Table 3 show the profile of the person of foreign origin who takes part in elections. Based on the data from 2018, the profile is characterised by a female voter (64.5%), with an average age of 48.5, medium to high educational level (48.1% with vocational training or higher), mainly of Latin American origin (78.6%), with an average length of residency in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country of 20.4 years and reflecting a certain balance between people in no financial difficulty (55.5%) and those in financial difficulties (44.%). In comparison with the general profile, this voter profile indicates a person above the average, with a high educational level, longer time of residence and a better financial situation. As regards gender and origin, the distribution of the voter and the general profile is similar.

A comparison of this profile with that of 2010 reveals that there has been a significant transformation in the type of person taking part in the Autonomous Community election. In 2010, the voter profile was characterised by being a man (56.5%) with an average age of 45.7; with a high educational level (48.3%), third level education; mainly from the EU (33.9%) and from Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic (30.7%); with an average length of stay of approximately 20 years; and the vast majority in no financial difficulty (78.4%).

In this respect, the comparison of both profiles indicates an evolution towards a more feminised voter, with a more diverse educational level, more Latin American and with a more balanced financial situation between those who are and are not in financial difficulties. In short, we can appreciate that, although the voter profile in 2010 was quite different from the general profile of the people of foreign origin with Spanish nationality, in 2018, the gap in the case of this profile was narrowed, revealing a voter not so different to the general profile.

5 Political and Social Participation and Subjective Perception of Integration

Having analysed in depth the degree of political and social participation of the population of foreign origin and the different profiles of the people taking part, we shall now focus on whether there is any relation between this participation and these

Table 3 Profile of population of foreign origin >18 with Spanish nationality in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country participating in Autonomous Community elections by migratory, socio-economic and demographic variables (% vertical)

		2010		2018	
		Autonomous Community	Total	Autonomous Community	Total
Gender	Male	56.3	45.0	35.5	34.1
	Female	43.7	55.0	64.5	65.9
Age (average)		45.7	41.7	48.5	45.6
Level of studies	No meaningful qualifications	3.1	4.0	3.2	7.2
	Compulsory	19.4	23.4	19.0	22.3
	Secondary	18.3	31.2	29.6	31.1
	VT I/II	11.1	11.8	21.5	19.1
	Third-level	48.3	29.6	26.6	20.3
Origen	Western EU	19.6	12.4	7.3	7.2
	Romania and other Eastern EU countries	14.0	5.9	0.8	0.4
	Maghreb	9.7	11.3	6.6	9.9
	Argentina, Chile, Uruguay	15.6	12.1	10.1	7.0
	Columbia, Ecuador, Peru	7.1	27.0	35.1	32.2
	Bolivia	0.7	1.4	8.4	10.2
	Paraguay	0.3	0.3	0.6	2.1
	Brazil, Venezuela, Dominican Rep.	15.1	13.4	12.1	11.8
	Rest of Latin America	5.5	7.5	12.2	11.2
	China	1.4	1.1	0.3	0.3
	Senegal	0.1	0.2	0.4	1.1
	Rest of Africa	3.3	3.5	2.3	3.3
	Rest of the world	7.6	3.8	3.7	3.2
	Years since they arrived in the Basque Autonomous Community(average)		19.8	15.3	20.4
Financial difficulties	With difficulties	21.6	38.3	44.5	50.5
	No difficulties	78.4	61.8	55.5	49.5
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: EPIE. Compiled by the authors

people's subjective perception of integration. Are political and social participation and subjective perception of integration related? Does participation influence this perception?

The descriptive research methodology of this study does not enable us to establish explanatory or causal relations between these variables, but it does allow us to identify a series of facts. The table shows the weighted average of the subjective

Table 4 Weighted average of the subjective perception of integration of the population of foreign origin >16 (scale 1–5)^a

	Participating	2010	2018
Informal immigrant groups	Yes	3.90	4.21
	No	4.01	4.14
Immigrant support organisation	Yes	3.94	4.32
	No	4.01	4.14
Sports clubs or associations	Yes	4.22	4.29
	No	3.98	4.13
Educational and/or cultural groups	Yes	4.09	4.30
	No	4.00	4.13
Religious groups and bodies	Yes	4.06	3.89
	No	4.00	4.16
Neighbours' associations	Yes	4.32	4.30
	No	4.00	4.14
Trade unions	Yes	4.29	4.35
	No	4.00	4.14
Political parties	Yes	4.35	4.38
	No	4.00	4.14
Autonomous community elections	Yes	4.56	4.49
	No	4.11	4.20

Source: EPIE. Compiled by the authors

^aIn the case of Autonomous Community elections, the weighted average is determined on the people of foreign origin >18 with Spanish nationality

perception of integration where 1 is not at all integrated and 5 highly integrated, depending on participation or not in the associations, organisations and elections that we have been analysing in this work. The results show that, in general, the degree of subjective perception of integration is quite high in the case of the different items (Table 4).

The data point to a positive relation between participation and the perception of integration, although there are appreciable differences depending on the organisation in which they participate. In 2018, the weighted average shows that the people of foreign origin who feel most integrated are those participating in electoral processes (4.49). With respect to the organisations and associations, the perception of integration is greater among those who participate in political parties (4.38) and trade unions (4.35), followed by immigrant support organisations (4.32), neighbours' associations (4.30), cultural and/or educational groups (4.30) and sports associations (4.29). As for perception of integration, it tends to be less among those participating in informal immigrant organisation (4.21) and religious bodies (3.89). On the other hand, in all cases, except for participation in religious bodies, perception of integration is greater among those who say they participate in comparison with those who say they do not participate. Moreover, the evolution since 2010 reveals an overall increase in the perception of integration among those who participate as well as among those who

do not. This increase is greater among those who participate in immigrant support organisations (+ 0.38), in informal immigrant organisations (+0.31) or in cultural and/or educational groups (+0.21). On the other hand, people participating in religious bodies lower their perception of integration by 0.17 points. In the other cases, the weighted average increases or decreases, though at a lesser intensity.

These data denote that the perception of integration is greater among those who take part in electoral processes and in political and social organisations and slightly less among those participating in the associative network. In solely descriptive terms, these data appear to suggest that political integration based on political participation may have a greater impact on the perception of integration, compared with social participation in the community fabric. Political participation implies taking part or influencing the decision-making process of the host society, and, therefore, it implies a greater commitment to the public sphere in which one feels integrated. In this respect, it is plausible to think that the length of stay and attachment also affect this dynamic and result in a greater perception of integration, in such a way that those who have resided for longer participate to a greater degree in political parties and trade unions and those who have lived a shorter time, on the other hand, are more involved in religious and informal immigrant associations. At the same time, identification with the political system and a sound legal situation are aspects underlying these dynamics and facilitate a greater perception of integration.

6 Conclusions

The analysis of political and social participation of the population of foreign origin in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country has allowed us to specifically identify the spheres in which said participation is carried out, the differences that exist between the profiles of the people participating and their relation with subjective perception of integration. In summary, we can conclude that, on the one hand, the population of foreign origin participate socially and politically to a similar degree as the overall population (except in the case of electoral participation), as it could not have been otherwise based on the existing regulations. What's more the profiles of the people of foreign origin vary depending on the type of participation. And, last of all, we can appreciate a greater perception of subjective integration among the immigrants who participate.

Political and social participation happens in an unequal way. In the case of participation in the associative network, it occurs mainly in cultural and/or educational and sports associations and, to a lesser extent, in informal immigrant groups and religious bodies. As for spaces of social relation, we can appreciate greater participation of a general and highly diverse nature in the associative network, which could imply a positive effect on the network of relations and social capital of the people participating in these associations. This argument is further strengthened by the data on the subjective perception of integration. The people of foreign origin taking part in educational, cultural or sports associations have a greater subjective

perception of integration than those participating in informal immigrant groups or religious bodies.

As for participation in political and social organisations, the results indicate that immigrants tend to participate to a greater extent in organisations whose mission is the defence of their rights and interests, whereas they are less involved in organisations of a more general nature. Thus, participation is greater in immigrant support organisations and trade unions and less in neighbours' associations and political parties. In this case, there is no correlation between this differentiation and the perception of integration. With regard to participation in elections, in line with what was yielded by other studies, the degree of participation is low among the people of foreign origin with Spanish nationality, indicating a greater capacity to defend their interests in the political agenda of the institutions.

On the other hand, the analysis of the profiles reveals differences and similarities in demographics, socio-economics, migration and citizenship according to the type of participation. Generally speaking, two types of profiles can be differentiated: on the one hand, that of those who are involved in immigrant organisations and, on the other, that of the rest of the organisations analysed. In the case of immigrant or immigrant support organisations, the profile is associated to a greater extent with immigrants at a more recent migratory stage, with those of African origin having specific importance, with a precarious legal situation and in financial difficulties. In the case of the rest of the organisations, though there are differences, the profile is based mainly on immigrants who are fully settled, with a high educational level, a sound legal situation, with fewer financial difficulties and where the percentage of Latin American origin is significant. In conclusion, we can see that participation in immigrant or immigrant support organisations is associated with a profile of an immigrant in need and with some sort of assistance and support, whereas in the case of the rest of organisations, participants are established immigrants with a better socio-economic situation. With regard to electoral participation, the profile is likewise associated with an established immigrant in a better socio-economic position.

Coming back to the idea with which we began this work, participation is a fundamental democratic element in society and its political system. Moreover, in the case of immigrants, it is an important factor in their integration process. In this work, we have been able to corroborate this relation between participation and integration. In addition, the relation between the migratory process and participation has helped show that the type of participation can vary depending on the migratory stage and can evolve from a type of participation directed at questions related to needs and the protection of rights to another of a more general nature which is associated with greater social and political integration. In this respect, these results highlight the need to grant special importance to participation policies in the framework of integration policies that take into account the different dimensions of participation and political integration.

Last of all, from the point of view of the social cohesion of an ethnoculturally diverse society such as the Basque one, it is important that the specific interests of the people of foreign origin have a place and occupy it in the decision-making space in the political agenda. Immigration laws; the legal problems associated with

citizenship; discrimination based on race, origin or religion; institutional or labour discrimination; language learning; and the effects of social inequality affecting them particularly are some of their many specific problems and interests because of their condition as immigrants or persons of foreign descent.

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Part IV
Critical Vision of the Epistemological
Methodologies and Frameworks from
Which Contemporary Western Democracy
Is Analysed

Methodologies for Transductive Strategies



Tomás R. Villasante 

Abstract The first four sections offer an overview of debates that have taken place in the last 50 years in the social sciences, using extended quotations from different authors. The argument covers texts from May 1968 and Marxisms in dispute, socio-analysis or institutional analysis, constructionist polemics, feminist contributions, and the ecology of knowledges, among others. The last part of the text explains social praxis (built up over the last 30 years) as a confluence that has been created from the contributions mentioned above. This is done not just by applying what has been learned from these approaches but also considering new practical techniques, by which it has been demonstrated how it is possible to take each one of the steps, or “transductive leaps,” that we take in networks, processes, and movements.

Keywords Participatory methodologies · Marxisms · Feminisms · Popular pedagogy · Second-order cybernetics · Participatory action research · Socio-analysis · Ecology of knowledges · Transductions · Socialpraxis

Updated version of the article: “Una articulación metodológica: desde textos del Socio-analysis, I(A)P, F. Praxis, Evelyn F. Keller, Boaventura S. Santos, etc.” (*Política y Sociedad*, 2007, Vol. 44 Num. 1: 141-157). In 2007, a monograph on Complexity and Participatory Methodologies was published in the Complutense University journal *Política y Sociedad*, and this included a text that forms the basis of the one presented here in rewritten form. That text in turn took up ideas from the 2006 book *Desbordes Creativos* (“Creative Overflows”) which was a detailed presentation of the grounding of what we had experienced and of what today we continue to carry out as “social praxis” (the new methodologies we contribute as part of participatory processes).

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1 Voluntarism and Practical Experimentation (1960s and 1970s)

The debate on participatory methodologies has been going on within the social sciences for years now. The only thing that is new is that now a number of crises have come together, making it more important than ever: the crisis in ecology and in globalized health, the economic and employment crises, the crises of formal democracies and the reappearance of populisms, but also the crisis of usefulness of the social sciences, and even of participatory methodologies. Forty or 30 years ago, what was dominant was activist movements full of faith in “history” or “participatory (action) research” with a strongly grassroots feel, as a criticism of conventional sociologies, anthropologies, psychologies, etc. Those were years with a strong presence of voluntarism, experimentation, self-criticism, and also some essential contributions that today can be taken up again from the point of view of new paradigms, complexity, social constructionisms, etc.

In 1968, Georges Lapassade made this public declaration after the famous revolt:

...This date, the 22nd of March, 1968, will be celebrated because it constitutes the true beginning of the May Revolution. The event, that 22nd of March, both confirms our theses and destroys them. It confirms them in the sense that the act consisted, that day, for the students of Nanterre, of occupying the central site of the dictatorship of the mandarins, the Boardroom where, around the Dean, all the holders of the Chairs that unlawfully held (and in fact still hold) all the powers in the whole institution met. This admirable initiative, with its magnificent symbolic effect, was the result of a collective invention. It is perhaps not irrelevant to point out that Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who characterized this insurrectional period with his political intelligence, did not want to occupy the administrative ‘Tower’ of Nanterre and that he rather proposed an occupation of the Sociology Department. However, his comrades in the struggle, with a very firm revolutionary instinct, had understood that they were beyond their teachers, that Nanterre belonged to them. That afternoon, Rene Lourau still considered the absence of Daniel Cohn-Bendit and his friends in the ‘institutional analysis group’ and later their active and insurgent presence, in ‘The Tower’ as a simple *passage à l’acte* with a rejection of analysis. He was wrong. He understood in the days following that the true analysis was the act of occupation. The true effectiveness was the symbolic effectiveness of this intervention in the sacred enclosed sites of university authority. The exemplary act briefly revealed itself as more true than the analysis, and those who changed the world were not the institution’s analysts but rather those students of the 22 March, led by activists, who knew Marx, Bakunin, Lenin, and Rosa Luxemburg better than their Sociology lecturers and who, above all, knew how to put them into practice today. Yes, indeed psychology is an agent of cultural repression. The famous seminars are often organizations of social control. It is necessary to be on one’s guard against the doctors of the factories, against the psychiatrists, and in general against all those who in our society assume the mission to help others, to listen to them, to understand them, and even to ‘heal them.’

Another word about practical experiences with small groups. It is necessary to maintain what the current state of observation teaches us about the problem of groups, the same principle in all experimental psychology that makes some people observed and manipulated in laboratories, objects for other people. Treating a person as an object of research and experimentation is a dangerous path, a dehumanizing one. This has been announced already by the totalitarian projects of domination... So, after May, there is nothing left of the myths of a political psychology that we had been talking about since 1962 (Argument, and the

Royaumont Congress)... Sociology students understood before their lecturers did.... In fact, official sociology (Action, Organizational, or Consensus Sociology) was dead in the Nanterre Sociology Department before the month of May. The events of May have completed its destruction. Nanterre '68: it is simply the end of socio-analysis and the return to the Marx of Praxis.

In parallel with these European seminars, in Latin America, other social scientists such as Orlando Fals Borda (Colombia) and Rodrigues Brandão (Brazil) disputed the usefulness of the conventional social sciences for peasant movements and, in general, for the construction of the “popular.” At that time, participatory action research (PAR) was spreading in what was then known as the Third World, as the implementation of social sciences that were critical of prevailing systems while also being useful for certain marginalized communities. The underlying belief that everything that came from the people had the same value as things that came out of the academy upsets the social sciences around the world. The testimony of the Spanish pioneer in PAR can give us an idea of how its intuitive, homemade approach was received in Europe. Paloma López de Ceballos (1989) saw it in this way:

Then I had the wonderful surprise that this participatory research seemed to have scientific value. London University's London School of Economics and the Sorbonne's École des hautes études offered to officially recognize the books published to replace the degree and the Master's in Cultural Anthropology and/or Sociology. I choose the Sorbonne in Paris for reasons of cultural proximity and I work in the British Museum in the summers in order to benefit from its fascinating documents. After a complementary oral exam on knowledge and aptitudes, carried out by my director of studies, H. Desroche, and his colleagues, the President of the Sorbonne's École des hautes études admits me directly into the second year of a doctorate.

New confirmations arise from the studies: 1. Very much in the French style I discover the importance of the categories of the unheard of and the logical in any investigation. 2. Along these same lines I learn something that I began in Singapore: to dismantle my intuitions and to reconstruct them in logical developments. 3. I familiarize myself with research as a craft production practiced at the highest scientific level. Levi Strauss elaborated his famous mathematical combinations regarding kinship relationship based on bits of paper with people's situations hanging from the ceiling and linked with threads, like a spider's web. Pierre Bourdieu discovered the meanings of Algerian myths by putting the corresponding categories four by four in concentric circles... and research as a craft production is definitively demonstrated by groups of peasants from Pau who research their spontaneous gestures and the secular knowledge that makes their agricultural work possible and they complain bitterly that a group of researchers from the French National Centre for Scientific Research has 'stolen' their discoveries and published them.

The third source of criticism of Western social sciences came from Marxisms. In terms of participatory methodologies, the “Chinese,” for example, emphasized the “mass line,” that is to say, learning from the experience of the “popular masses” or, to put it another way, the equation of knowledge is practice-consciousness-practice, or matter-consciousness-matter. In the essay “Where Do Correct Ideas Come From” (May 1963) Mao Tse-Tung says:

Man's knowledge makes another leap through the test of practice. This leap is more important than the previous one. For it is this leap alone that can prove the correctness or incorrectness of the first leap in cognition, i.e., of the ideas, theories, policies, plans or measures formulated in the course of reflecting the objective external world. There is no other way of

testing truth. Furthermore, the one and only purpose of the proletariat in knowing the world is to change it. Often, correct knowledge can be arrived at only after many repetitions of the process leading from matter to consciousness and then back to matter, that is, leading from practice to knowledge and then back to practice. Such is the Marxist theory of knowledge, the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge. Among our comrades there are many who do not yet understand this theory of knowledge. When asked the sources of their ideas, opinions, policies, methods, plans and conclusions, eloquent speeches and long articles they consider the questions strange and cannot answer. Nor do they comprehend that matter can be transformed into consciousness and consciousness into matter, although such leaps are phenomena of everyday life.

Later on, Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez (1987) took stock of the different Marxisms in a more up-to-date and critical way and unraveling the position of Antonio Gramsci on the “philosophy of praxis”:

There are evidently different tendencies within Marxism today. Something that they all have in common is that they appeal to Marx and emphasize –adequately, in a deformed way, or absolutizing it–, some aspect of Marxian thought. There is, firstly, an objectivist, and in a certain way economicist, tendency that goes back to the Marxism of the Second International, continues in the Third and which was finally established in Soviet Marxism of the present day. This tendency absolutizes the objective factors of development, certainly pointed out by Marx, but sacrifices to them the subjective, practical activity. In philosophical terms, this tendency draws on Engels of the Anti-Dühring and Lenin of materialism and empirio-criticism and particularly the Stalinist reification of the universal laws of the dialectic (including the law of the dialectic of nature) of which history would be a specific field for their application. A second tendency, which arises in the 1930s with the publication of Marx’s 1844 manuscripts and which influences the ‘humanist’ interpretations that flourish in the decades of the 50s and 60s and extend to our own times, absolutizes the ideological, humanist component of Marxian thought at the expense of its scientific character and, to a certain extent, of its class, revolutionary content. A third tendency leaves to one side the ontological and anthropological problems of the two previous tendencies and focuses on an epistemological reading of Marx. Marxism is defined, above all, by its ‘scientificity’ and self-sufficient ‘theoretical practice’ moves into a central place. The theory is separate from real practice, and the ideological aspect is uncoupled in this way from the scientific aspect. This is the tendency promoted by Althusser and his followers and which, during the 1960s, spread and was influential both in West European and Latin American countries. Although the links between these three tendencies and certain aspects of Marxian thought cannot be denied, by emphasizing respectively the ontological, ideological in a humanist sense, or epistemological problems, they forget or put into the background something that in our judgement is essential: praxis as a theoretical and practical activity, both subjective and objective. It is precisely this that brings to the foreground the tendency that we have called ‘philosophy of praxis’ and which, in our view, is the one that has its roots most deeply situated in Marxian thought.

2 Socio-analysis and Constructivism (1980s and 1990s)

Two very influential methodologies in our social sciences return to socio-analysis’ call to practice as a very explicit background orientation, since they consider that other methodologies are “instruments” or “degenerations” of socio-analysis. However, the truth is that their magnificent investigations never managed to unravel

these participatory methodologies and to construct tools and articulations that respond to these recommendations. The thoughts of Pierre Bourdieu (1980–1991) are:

In short, one has quite simply to bring into scientific work and into the theory of the practices that it seeks to produce, a theory—which cannot be found through theoretical experience alone— of what it is to be native, that is to say, in that relationship of ‘learned ignorance’ of immediate but unselfconscious understanding which defines the practical relationship to the world... What is at stake is how far the objectifier is willing to be caught up in the work of objectification... But I would probably not have overcome the last obstacles that prevented me from recognizing the forms of thought most characteristic of pre-logical logic in the logic of practice if I had not, somewhat accidentally, encountered this ‘primitive’ logic in the very heart of the familiar world, in the responses to a public opinion survey by a polling organization in 1975, in which the respondents were asked to associate French political leaders with a variety of objects... It could be seen that in many of its operations, guided by a simple ‘sense of the opposite’, ordinary thought, like all ‘pre-logical’ (or practical) thought, proceeds by oppositions, an elementary form of specification that leads it, for example, to give to the same term as many opposites as there are practical relations it can entertain [...] This last example, like the others, is not put forward to exhibit the particular (and very real) difficulties of sociology or the particular merits of the sociologist, but to try to give a practical understanding of the fact that every genuine sociological undertaking is, inseparably, a socio-analysis, and so to help its product to become in turn the means of a socio-analysis.

Jesús Ibáñez (1988) particularly develops the qualitative in his work but aims to articulate the quantitative, the qualitative, and the dialectic (socio-analysis) as a response to the criticism of complexity:

Von Foerster (1960) distinguishes three ways of creating order: from order—mechanicity—in dynamic systems or systems of organized simplicity; from disorder—regularity—in stochastic systems or systems of non-organized complexity; and from noise—creativity—in linguistic systems or systems of organized complexity... The genotypes of the effect of society (what is done) are the institutions: they are devices for choosing within the law. Each subject is tied by a network that makes a groove in social space-time: a grooved space is the junction of a fixed vertical chain (the chains of organizational structures or affiliations) with a variable horizontal connection (the connections of organizational structures or affiliations). Yet these networks are constantly overwhelmed and transformed, the instituted situations are cracked by instituting movements. It is not possible to analyse an institution out of context: only in-situ institutional analysis (socio-analysis) can account for institutional processes (Lourau, 1970)... If they are carried out well, the survey is etic, phenomenal, quantitative, classical; the group discussion is emic, generative (accounting for the group), qualitative (although the positive content of the quality is lost in the negativity of the differences and similarities between qualities), relativist (the researcher self-analyses their countertransference, but is outside the group); socio-analysis is etic-emic, generative (accounting for the production), qualitative (the positive content of the experienced qualities is recovered), reflexive (the researcher forms part of the group). It can be considered that all social research techniques constitute degenerations of socio-analysis. Socio-analysis contains within it all of the existential context (effect of society) and all of the conventional context (effect of language).

This debate within the sciences in general, and within the social sciences in particular, can be summarized by citing the conversation among E. Fox Keller, Barnett Pearce, and Von Glasersfeld regarding more or less social constructivisms and constructionisms. At this conference, Fox Keller (1994) offered a series of background questions in order to distinguish among various kinds of constructionisms:

So the question is opened up, and I would like to invite Professor Von Glaserfeld to explore in that direction: What are the purposes of cognition, of knowledges. Whose are these purposes, how do these purposes become adaptations and for whom are they adapted?

It seems to me that we are leaving out what is beginning to be a quite conspicuous entire dimension of scientific knowledge as intervention in the world. And that the aims, the purposes of modern science have in fact never been purely representational, but have always been an articulated set of interventional aims.

Pearce: "I am going to argue in a moment that we need others for far more than that, but is that a fair characterization of the cognitive interest and the individualistic perspective?"

Von Glasersfeld: "Yes, it wants to talk about knowing and nothing else."

Pearce: "Then that helps me set up a distinction between constructivism and social constructivism ...

What I would like to then do is to suggest that the use of cybernetics might be extended one step further. In addition to knowledge as just looking at the self-regulation of observing one's own cognitive functions—the operatives—, what if it were the case that social settings pre-exist and prefigure the kinds of operations that can go and the kinds of purposes that would be met within them? ...

We all agree first, that language constructs the world, it does not 'represent'. We agree that it is not possible to represent the world as it is before the representation, because language has an effective formative aspect ...

The second characteristic of communication that all those involved in the new paradigm agree on is that the first function of language is the construction of human worlds, not simply the transmission of messages from one place to another. Communication becomes, in this way, a constructive process, not a mere channel of messages or ideas, or a signal indicating the outside world.

The third point of consensus is that communication becomes the primary social process. As Prigogine pointed out, scientists of the new paradigm understand their work as a communication with nature. The social sciences are understood as communication among a group of individuals who call themselves researchers and others who call themselves, or are called, subjects. Conferences like these are considered to be communicative events, and not mere transmission of information...

My fourth point, however, abandons the comfortable domain of consensus: ... within the new paradigm there are two positions on the nature of communication, one focussing on language and the other on activities as a constructive medium.... This (latter) position maintains that we are immersed in social activities, that language is in our worlds but it is not their parameter... More precisely, it is a 'part' in the sense that it impregnates totality, but it does not coincide with that totality; it is not the totality. I call this approach social constructionism. It is based on the North American pragmatists, particularly William James, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead. It also rests on the work of Wittgenstein's late period, particularly on his emphasis on language games and his emphasis on the idea that rules are not different from the activity itself. The third basis for social constructionism is Systems Theory. Systems Theory includes Gregory Bateson, with his marvellous ability to think systemically, and Ludwig von Bertalanffy, with his marvellous ability to think about systems—which is not the same—."

Tomás Ibáñez (2003) more recently has reminded us that in social constructionisms it is also necessary to carry out certain self-criticisms that indicate the absence of the "non-discursive" (body, institutions, technologies, etc.) as well as the practices and policies that arise from this social task:

The truth is that there is no lack of arguments for considering, in an eminently critical way, the current limitations of social constructionism, and I would like to highlight, in this regard, two lines of argument.

The first is related to the emphasis that social constructionism placed on the unquestionable importance of language, and on the discursive nature of certain entities and of certain psychological phenomena that it would be convenient to denaturalize, de-essentialize, and to tear out of the supposed 'interiority' of the individual. Although some of the social constructionist formulations can reveal themselves to be vulnerable to the accusation of falling into a certain linguistic idealism, I do not think that this can be generalized to most constructionist analyses, or that it constitutes an important problem. The problem lies, rather, in that that necessary attention paid to the sphere of discursiveness has not been accompanied by an equal interest in the field, and it is a very broad field, of non-discursive practices. What has been left to one side are the objects that exercise their effects through means that are essentially non-linguistic, such as the body, certain technologies or social structures and institutions themselves.

The second line of argument is related to the incapacity, or perhaps with the resistances, of social constructionism to extract the explicitly political consequences of its own suppositions, and to develop an intervention at the theoretical level and at the level of practices, so that these are in harmony with the unbearable nature of the conditions of existence that our model of society imposes on the immense majority of humans and with the unavoidable urgency of building a different world.

3 New Feminist Approaches (1990s and 2000s)

"The postulate of value free research, of neutrality and indifference towards the research objects, has to be replaced by conscious partiality, which is achieved through partial identification with the research objects.

1. The vertical relationship between researcher and research objects, the view from above, must be replaced by the view from below in order to apply a scientific and an ethical-political dimension.
2. The contemplative, uninvolved spectator knowledge must be replaced by active participation in actions, movements and struggles in favour of the conditions of life of women and men.
3. Participation in social actions and struggles, and the integration of research into these processes, further implies that the change of the status quo becomes the starting point for a scientific quest. The motto for this approach could be: 'If you want to know a thing, you must change it.'
4. The research process must become a process of conscientization, both for the so-called research subjects and for the research objects, that is to say, research should be inspired by the conditions of oppression to offer sufficient tools to the research objects for them to improve their quality of life.
5. In short, it should be accompanied by the study of their individual and social history in order to analyse, rigorously, their situation of marginality and oppression." (Mies and Shiva, 1993: 59–83)

Among all the social movements, Evelyn Fox Keller highlights the influence of the considerations of the feminist political impulse on her scientific work. For this reason (and by way of example) we take up these movements' criticisms of the violence of science and their contributions to "creative power":

Personally I am in debt to feminist theory... Feminist theory is an intellectual undertaking that arose from a political impulse. The goal of the political impulse was to question gender demarcations and their constrictions, as a system in the discourse. And this political impulse led to an intellectual programme whose objective is to understand how gender works. ...

The aim of feminist theory is, then, to analyse and deconstruct the symbolic work of gender in the social, cognitive and political spheres. Feminist theory has been a magnifying glass that identified, that looked at the world with the aim of seeing where gender demarcations were, or where gender operated, in order to subvert it. And this work became a method that has sometimes been described with the following slogan: 'The political is personal and the personal is political'. I systematically sought to identify, to reveal the 'personal elements of the political' and the 'political elements of the personal', the silent, hidden subjective dimension of the objective; the rational dimension of the emotional and the emotional dimensions of the rational.

María Mires (1993) condemned the violence of science, its definitions and separations between the theoretical and the practical, in order to appeal to "subject-subject reciprocity" in a new science:

For specialists in bioethics, the problem set by genetic and reproductive technology is only a matter of definitions. The violence of the scientific lies mainly in power to define. Direct violence has been transformed into structural violence, apparently clean and pure...

The same arbitrary logic of 'divide and rule' is applied in everything regarding the distinction between basic research and applied research, or application of the results of the research. The essential or basic research is not, in moral terms, either better or purer than applied research, if in the basic research it is permitted to violate all taboos, ignore all moral principles that apply in a society, and this is also the case with the application of the results of that research. There is no other way out: according to the paradigm of the new patriarchies: what can be done, will be done ...

The taboo that is never mentioned on ethics committees is the profoundly immoral partnership between science and force, science and militarism, science and the patriarchy ...

Scientists should never do to other creatures what they would never do to themselves ...

In a new science what should occupy a central place is the principle of subject-subject reciprocity. This would presuppose that the object of study is once again considered to be a living being with its own dignity/soul/subjectivity. A new science should never forget the fact that we also are a part of nature, that we have a body, that we depend on Mother Earth, that we are born of a woman, and that we die...

It is a promising sign that the radical criticism of science, which originated among feminists and which is still being developed by them, has meanwhile induced some men to start to also reflect on themselves, and also on the patriarchal image of the White Man, the culture hero of Western civilization, and above all on the natural scientist, who, in collaboration with masculine complicity in the military sphere, in politics and in economics, has made us suffer so many wars and catastrophes...

Vandana Shiva (1995) gives this level of "higher-order cognition" to the point of view of the subject-subject relationship because it is more inclusive, because we are all trapped in the same dialectic:

One cannot really distinguish the masculine from the feminine, person from nature, Purusha from Prakriti. Though distinct, they remain inseparable in dialectical unity, as two aspects of one being.

The recovery of the feminine principle is thus associated with the non-patriarchal, non-gendered category of creative non-violence, or 'creative power in peaceful form', as Tagore stated in his prayer to the tree.

The recovery of the feminine principle is a response to multiple dominations and deprivations not just of women, but also of nature and non-western cultures. It stands for ecological recovery and nature's liberation, for women's liberation and for the liberation of men who, in dominating nature and women, have sacrificed their own human-ness. Ashis Nandy says, one must choose the slave's standpoint not only because the slave is oppressed but also because he represents a higher-order cognition which perforce includes the master as a human, whereas the master's cognition has to exclude the slave except as a 'thing'. Liberation must therefore begin from the colonised and end with the coloniser. As Gandhi was to so clearly formulate through his own life, freedom is indivisible, not only in the popular sense that the oppressed of the world are one, but also in the unpopular sense that the oppressor, too, is caught in the culture of oppression.

4 Action Research and Ecology of Knowledges (2000–)

Of all the things put forward by Boaventura S. Santos, it is important to emphasize his arguments to the new Brazilian Minister of Education, Tarso Genro, in 2004. He underlined "action research" and "community research" but above all the "ecology of knowledges" and "science shops" to combat "cognitive injustice":

Action research and the ecology of knowledges are areas of university legitimation that transcend extension activities since they act both at the level of extension and at the level of research and training. Action research consists of the participative definition and execution of research projects involving popular social organizations and communities grappling with problems whose solution can benefit from the results of the research. The social interests are tied to the scientific interests of the researchers and so the production of scientific knowledge is directly linked to the satisfaction of the needs of social groups lacking the resources to have access to specialized technical knowledge through the market. Action research, which is not specific to the social sciences, has not generally been a priority for universities. However, it has a long tradition in Latin America, although it was stronger in the 1960s and 70s. Just as with extension activities, the new centrality of action research is due to the fact that the neoliberal transnationalization of higher education is transforming the university into a global institution of action research at the service of global capitalism. Here too, the battle against this functionalism is only made possible by constructing a social alternative that focuses on the university's social utility and defines it in a counter-hegemonic way.

The ecology of knowledges is a more in-depth form of action research. It involves an epistemological revolution in the heart of the university, and therefore cannot be legislated for. The reform should hardly create institutional spaces that facilitate and incentivize its occurrence. The ecology of knowledges is a kind of counter-extension or extension in reverse, that is from outside to inside the university. It consists of the promotion of dialogues between scientific and humanistic knowledge produced by the university, on the one side, and the lay, popular, traditional, urban, peasant, provincial and non-Western (indigenous, African, etc.) knowledges, on the other. Along with the technological euphoria, there is also today a lack of epistemological confidence in science that derives from the growing

visibility of the perverse consequences of some kinds of scientific progress and the fact that many of modern science's social premises have not been fulfilled. It is beginning to be socially perceptible that the university, by specialising in scientific knowledge and considering it the only kind of valid knowledge, has actively contributed to the disqualification and destruction of much potentially invaluable non-scientific knowledge, thus causing the marginalization of social groups to whom these kinds of knowledge were the only ones available. So social injustice contains cognitive injustice at its core. This is particularly obvious on the global scale, where peripheral countries, rich in non-scientific wisdom but poor in scientific knowledge, have seen that latter, in the form of economic science, destroy their ways of sociability, their economies, their indigenous and rural communities, and their environments.¹

In very different ways, something similar happens in the central countries where the negative environmental and social impacts of scientific development are beginning to be included in public deliberation, pressing for scientific knowledge to confront other knowledges, of a lay or philosophical kind, common sense, and even religious knowledges. Some of the processes of promoting critical active citizenship pass through this confrontation.

The ecology of knowledges is sets of practices that promote a new, active bringing together of knowledges with the goal that all of them, including scientific knowledge, can become enriched by the dialogue. It involves a wide range of actions of evaluation, both of scientific knowledge and of other practical knowledges considered to be useful, shared by researchers, students and groups of citizens, serving as a basis for the creation of wider epistemic communicates that convert the university into a public space of inter-knowledge where citizens and social groups can intervene without being exclusively learners.

Action research and the ecology of knowledges are situated within the search for a joint reorientation of the university-society relationship. This is the case with 'science shops'. Based on the experiences of action research and the activism of scientists and students in the 1970s, science shops were created and they became a movement with significant dynamism in various European countries. After a period of relative decline, the movement is enjoying a resurgence today in Europe with the support of the European Commission, and also in other parts of the world. In the United States there is a movement that is close, although with certain other characteristics, which is 'community-based research'. This movement, which is now organized internationally into the 'living knowledge' network, seeks to create a public space of knowledges where the university can confront cognitive injustice through the joint orientation of its functions.

Science shops are a hybrid in which action research and the ecology of knowledges are combined. A science shop is a unit that can be connected with a university and within it to a department or a specific organic unit, which responds to requests by citizens or groups of citizens, by associations or civic movements, or tertiary sector organizations, and in certain cases, private sector companies, to carry out projects that are clearly of public interest (identification and proposals for the solution of social or environmental problems, or problems in the field of employment, public health, energy, etc., constitution of organizations and associations of social community interest, promotion of public deliberation, etc.).

The request is studied jointly through participative procedures in which all interested parties, as well as those who run the science shop, take part.

¹The reciprocal link between social justice and cognitive injustice was to be one of the ideas that would be most resisted within the university, precisely because historically it was the great agent of the epistemicide committed against local, lay, indigenous, popular knowledges in the name of modern science. In Brazil, the resistance has been perhaps even greater since the university-educated elite was easily attracted to the self-congratulatory idea of the new country, a country without history, as if in Brazil there were only descendants of European immigrants from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and not indigenous ancestral peoples and descendants of slaves.

Those in charge of the shop contact departments or specialists at the university and ultimately within the inter-university network of science shops to find people interested in taking part in the specific project. Then a team is created that includes all interested parties, which designs the project and the participatory methodology for intervention.² At universities in some countries (Denmark, for example) science shops are integrated into the curricular activities of different courses. Training seminars are offered so that students who wish to do so can relate with the results of that participation. The same happens when doing a postgraduate thesis, which can consist of a project that responds to a science shop request.

Science shops are an interesting experience of the democratization of science and of a move towards solidarity in university activity. Despite the fact that some universities — under pressure to seek income on the market— have become involved by transforming themselves into units for rendering services for payment, a model dedicated to social solidarity has a strong potential to create niches of civic and social care when educating students, and in the university’s relationship with society, and to work as incubators of social interest and active citizenship.³

Science shops, among other examples, show how the university as a public institution can take on a social aspect when educating students and in research and extension activities. Apart from science shops, other activities carried out seek to contextualize scientific knowledge. They have in common the reconceptualization of the processes and priorities of research based on users and the transformation of these users into co-producers of knowledge. See, for example, the contribution of AIDS sufferers to clinical tests and the contribution of this approach in the research agenda for treating the disease in Brazil and South Africa.

5 Social Praxis Confluence (1990s to 2011, and After)

Apart from these very interesting contributions cited above, we in the CIMAS and the Sentipensante networks work to move forward with these methodologies based on the practical paths that we are traveling together with the movements, cooperatives, municipalities, etc. that we work with. We are learning with the experiences of Mexico, Honduras, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, the Canary Islands, Andalusia, Madrid, the Basque Country, and Catalonia. In each place there are teams that are carrying out work of the social praxis kind. The methodological reference points taken have been in some cases Paulo Freire and “popular pedagogies”; in others the PAR of Fals Borda; or militant co-research; or PRAs, “participatory rural appraisals”; or the contributions of feminisms, etc. Above all, it is based on the *indignados* mobilizations of 2011 that these methodologies have become more widespread.

Here we present a confluence based on these approaches, their differences, and their most creative elements, so that each group can choose and create their own combination and not remain limited to just one of the contributions. Of course, this

²Participation is only genuine to the extent that it effectively conditions results, means, and methods to get there. Under the name of participation, and other similar names, including consultation, North-South “aid” projects are carried out which are clearly neo-colonial in nature.

³An analysis of the science shops can be read in a study by Wachelder (2003).

is just one of the possibilities, and this is not proposed as anything other than one reference point in debate with others. However, the aim is also to show that there are possibilities to perform “creative leaps” based on some practical movements and on reflection upon certain theoretical contributions.

The table shows the epistemologies and methodologies that have proved fertile to us in the order in which we have applied them. The columns show those fields where they are principally applied, from the most “micro” personal and group situations, to the community, to the most “macro” situation – that of a society. We have also tried to offer visibility to a set of woman writers and not just to the men with the most impressive reputations. Furthermore, we have tried to mingle some contributions from the natural sciences with those from the social sciences, socialist contributions with libertarian contributions, grassroots proposals with the most erudite ones, etc. The 15 positions of reference have different degrees of specificity, because this is how they reached us and how we made use of them. What is presented is a table that can act both to distinguish them and to combine them. In this way anyone can build their own schema of reference, including other scientific, activist or artistic traditions, with more local authors, etc.

Distinctions and confluences, among practical and theoretical approaches received in recent decades, for the construction of social praxis, with respect to different waves or fields of involvement

Fields→ ↓ Stages	Short wave: groups Sociopolitical “transductive” ethics	Medium wave: communities Leaps with “self-eco- organized” groups	Long wave: society Strategies based on “emerging praxis”
Practical overflows of the academies	Beyond the “established analysts,” Situational and Instituting Analyzers , Institutional Socio-Analysis (G. Debord, J. Jacobs, D. Haraway, F. Guatari, R. Lourau, etc.) Drifts, socio-dramas, timelines, etc.	Beyond “subject-object distances,” Subject-Subject Strategies , of Participatory (Action) Research, militant research, etc. (K. Lewin, O. Fals Borda, C. R. Brandao, M. Montero, S. Rivera, Colectivo IOE, O. Jara, etc.) Participatory workshops and meetings including all those involved	Beyond “seeing, judging, and acting,” Action-Reflection-Action Involvement , of Praxis Philosophies (R. Luxemburg, H. Lefebvre, P. González Casanova, M. Barnet Pearce, E. Fox Keller, J. Riechmann, etc.) Situated and transformative processes and mobilizations

<p>Fields→ ↓ Stages</p>	<p>Short wave: groups Sociopolitical “transductive” ethics</p>	<p>Medium wave: communities Leaps with “self-eco-organized” groups</p>	<p>Long wave: society Strategies based on “emerging praxis”</p>
<p>Leaps through complexity and emergent systems</p>	<p>Beyond “model laws and ethics,” Collaborative and Transductive Approaches, of the Paradigm of Emerging Systems (H. Von Foerster, H. Maturana, F. Varela, R. Braidotti, F. Capra, G. Simondon, J. Ibáñez, etc.) Initial self-reflection, negotiated by different groups</p>	<p>Beyond organizational charts and “power structures,” Strategies with Action Groups, Network Analysis, and “creative relationships” in “networks and figurations” (N. Elias, E. Bott, P. Freire, L. Lomnitz, M. Granovetter, etc.) Strategic mappings of actors (schemas with 4 variables)</p>	<p>Beyond “simplifying the determinist dialectic,” Making Paradoxes and Tetralemmas, from Pragmatics and Conflict Theory, with Eastern dialectics (Bakhtin, J. Galtung, F. Jameson, R. Reguillo, G. Abril, etc.) Multilemmas for workshops with “social creativity”</p>
<p>Construction of collective schemas</p>	<p>Beyond “Oedipal family triangles,” Open Processes and Operative Groups, through ECRO (operative groups), schizoanalysis and ROCE (E. Pichón-Rivière, J. Kristeva, F. Guattari, M. Sorin, A. Lans, etc.) Operative groups and “care motor groups”</p>	<p>Beyond “developmentalist indicators,” Sustainability with Integrated Resources, with Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) based on agroecology (R. Chambers, V. Shiva, A. Acosta, M. Ardón, Y. Herrero, etc.) Visualization of resources and transitions to “good living together”</p>	<p>Beyond “linear, cause-and-effect determinisms,” Satisfactors and the Solidarity Economy, with Situational Strategic Planning (H. Henderson, Max Neef, C. Matus, J. L. Coraggio, C. Carrasco, A. Pérez Orozco, etc.) Flow diagrams and priority for “life in the center”</p>
<p>Twentieth-century movements</p>	<p>Opposed to “dominant value equivalents” Reversions with Popular Overflows, With the Action-training of Pedagogía Comunicación Popular (C. Núñez, J. Matos Mar, D. Juliano, J. Martín Barbero, etc.) Spaces for creativity with action-training</p>	<p>Opposed to “patriarchal styles” and “Cainite sectarianisms,” Inclusive Movements from Daily Life, with eco-feminisms and indigenous movements (Mov. Sin Tierra, Mov. Chipko, Chiapas, etc.) Self-eco-organization with workshops and meetings with care</p>	<p>Opposed to “exploitation and neo-colonization” Horizontal Force Ideas linking up with workers’ and decolonizing fronts (F. Fanon, A. Davis, A. Escobar, S. Federicci, B. S. Santos, etc.) Integrated and inclusive participatory strategies</p>

Fields→ ↓ Stages	Short wave: groups Sociopolitical “transductive” ethics	Medium wave: communities Leaps with “self-eco- organized” groups	Long wave: society Strategies based on “emerging praxis”
Contemporary movements	Opposed to media “post-truths” and their viral circulation, Demonstrations of “Good Living Together” with Sustainability (Transition towns, Integrated Cooperatives, Good Living/Liveability, A. Roy, R. Zibechi, etc.) Smart groups for working enjoyably based on co-labor action	Opposed to “democracies of minorities” and “low intensity democracy,” Democracies with Grassroots Initiatives with Core Groups (I. Thomas, Kerala, H. Wainwright, M. Harnecker, pro-commons protest-proposal movements, Ch. Laval, P. Dardot, etc.) Deliberative workshops, task groups, and democratic circuits	Opposed to the “dictatorship of economization and global speculation” Inclusive Mobilizations (from the World Social Forum to municipal movements, Latin American movements, <i>indignados</i> mobilizations, R. Gutiérrez A, etc.) Monitoring with different overflowing resistances

Source: re-elaborated based on T. R. Villasante, 2006

The first distinction is in giving priority to the “situational and instituting analyzers” as opposed to instituted academic analysts. The “analyzer” is an act, an event, that usually offers us more complexity and reality than any “analyst” with their academic texts. The priority is to depart from or create “situations” that provoke more profound analysis, which show what is instituted and what is institutional in any group or situation. The instituting processes can be of different degrees, and they are always in dialogical contrast to the instituted, but it is by situating ourselves in these processes, and not attempting to define them academically, that we can advance both in transforming the reality and in understanding it. Distinguishing and giving more importance to the “analyzing facts” than to the analysts’ texts does not mean that we should not read and debate but rather that we should carry out theoretical practice based on establishing ourselves in a certain instituting situation as a reference point for any reflection.

We also establish distinctions between those who put distance between the subject and the object of research or of a social process. Researchers cannot be full subjects without conditioning factors, and those being investigated cannot be mere objects to be observed. People and groups have their own strategies when faced with those who ask them, and they know how to analyze why these people are interested in each individual or social conversation. We are guided by emotions and by subcultures, both those that say they are carrying out a process and those who feel carried along with it. Countering the subject-object relationship (which is said to be “scientifically objective”), there are always personal and group subject-subject strategies that are in conflict in the construction of actions and explanations that interest each

party. Investigations are always “participatory” actions, whether this is recognized or not. Both in a survey and in a discussion group, whoever is more passive may want to deceive, depending on how that person receives the questions put or depending on how the researcher is dressed or talks.

The third practical overflow that we experienced years ago was the importance of “involvement” for any knowledge. In the first place because you are always involved, and if you are not aware of this, then so much the worse, because you do not have any control over where you are. You cannot “see or judge” from outside of the society, because we are part of the society. However, we cannot remain paralyzed because of this lack of distance that we are submerged in, either. Anything we do, or do not do, also involves us practically, and for this reason, reflection is always in between two actions. Carrying out this reflection, aware of these processes of involvement, is what we call “praxis.” This is related to the traditions of the activist movements, of being aware that “passion does not take away knowledge,” rather that it takes it away from those who do not know what they are involved in and do not put a minimum of distance between themselves and their conditioning factors. If I understand the Marxist heritage, for example, I am in a position to distance myself from errors that have historically been committed involving different and real experiences, but if we do not know which leg is lame, it is more difficult to prevent such errors.

Later came the leaps to the “complexity” of things and of relationships. As against the position of aiming to find the “law that explains everything” or the “exemplary ethic” to be followed, it seems to us more modest and realistic that we accept the “paradigms of complexity.” The laws of universal gravitation or of natural selection have their specific applications in which they are observed, but there are other spheres where they require other, more complex logics. The logic of the markets, or of human rights, are not as simple as just enunciating a law, since motivations in different human cultures vary substantially, as do cooperative styles. In the natural sciences, the symbiotic and the synergic appear as much or more than the competitive, and their conjugation allows approaches that permit “transductive” leaps, that is to say, leaps from some energies to others, both to see with our eyes by means of connections between light and neurons and to grow a plant through the actions of enzymes. Transductive styles, which act to accustom us to leap, are also present in social relations and can be learned with these participatory methodologies.

Analyses of power have frequently been very simplistic, and this might also be said about some of the “social network analyses.” Instead of trying to locate power in a place, institution, or person, the possibility exists of establishing it as a set of relationships or strategies. The different positions are thus shown according to the kind and intensity of links that are established in each case. It is what is commonly called “sets of actions” (such as the “networks and figurations” of N. Elias, 1994) for specifying, in daily life, the determining factors of class or ideologies in play in each situation. Relations that are built up between trust and distrust between the different positions, between fears and gratitude, but not from a point of view of individual psychology but rather from the collective and participatory confirmation

of the “specific analysis of each specific situation.” In this way, the “strategic maps” of relationships (P. Freire, 2008) allow us to understand the strategies that are confronted or are set up at each moment, for their historically constructed economic, social, or even emotional interests.

We have performed the third leap toward complexity by working with the paradoxical expressions of the subjects involved in the processes. People’s words and gestures do not indicate to us unique and distinct positions, and neither is it clear that everything is reduced to a dialectic of two opposing themes. There are also intermediate positions, and there are also positions that are both one and the other at the same time, and even positions that are completely apart, neither one nor the other. Linguistic analyses have gone beyond dilemmas and consider “tetralemmas” or double dilemmas that we all use daily even though we do not realize it. For pragmatic criticism, a “semantic” regarding the nature of expressions is not enough, instead seeing that they involve the forms of communication, the gestures in their contexts, in practical, situational relationships. With J. Galtung (2004) we enter into “pentalemmas.” These kinds of considerations open us up to greater depth and to new alternatives. Not only that the winner may be one program, or the other, or the intermediate, but that they can both be negated, opening up new paths and solutions, even that they put into play strategies that can add up those which are apparently contrary.

This is what we construct collaboratively through “multilemmas.” This consists of moving from the surface of the first dilemmas to the depths of what we can build beyond first impressions. “Social creativity” appears as a collective construction that is concerned with finding a way out of the prison of dilemmas, in workshops, meetings, and practices, which can be enjoyed with other people and groups, which take the opportunity to feel the emotions and thoughts that can make us live better. It does not set the private interest against the general one but rather builds both, articulating them in its most novel expressions.

From the 1990s onward, we have been building certain new collective schemas. We think through schemas, and often these enclose us in “endogamic” process that hardly let us out of what the group of reference debates. If we do not see more, it is because we are not educated to see more than what fits into what we previously have wanted to see, in order to maintain a “security” that we have been educated in. However, based on cognitive theories (“enaction”) from the social psychology of the “link” or ECRO (from the Spanish initials for “operative and relational conceptual schemas), etc., it cannot be imagined that just anyone can resolve their problems merely through introspection or through exercises in taking notice. The idea with “operative groups” is to open up processes of communal involvement, which undertake associated and situational practices – “operative relations acting on conceptual schemas” (ROCE) (Villasante, 2014).

We use diverse techniques and methodologies that have allowed us to realize very abstract concepts that are sometimes lost in meaningless verbiage. For example, the “sustainability” of processes might mean almost anything according to who interprets it. Even if we take some “dominant indicators” of our statistics, in order to specify what we are referring to, we can choose in such a way that we are always

right, if we do it cleverly enough. However, some peasant movements have taught us that the PRA is a practical form that is a much more reliable and functional way to build sustainability. For example, “agroecology” uses the “integrated resources” that each community has available and can demonstrate that there are ecological and economic forms for “living better” based on these participatory methodologies.

Sustainability is not justified by certain macro-economic figures, which some experts might offer us, but rather by the criteria and indicators that demonstrate “quality of life” for each community at any given time, thus setting the pace of their way of life. In the conventional analyses of “strategic planning,” “cause-and-effect” processes appear that are used as a basis for predicting the success of what is being designed by recognized experts. However, what happens in real life is very different, given that the credentials or criteria required for giving opinions are usually very restricted and very biased according to the interests of those who give the orders. Furthermore, there are usually unforeseen circumstances that do not fit with what those who have intervened say, based on their presuppositions.

As against interested “determinisms” it is better to accept “recursive coincidences,” determining factors that overlap, which are not so linear and which are more participative, making it possible to improvise, rectify and monitor processes based on people’s own interests. “Endogenous development” must always take into consideration changing external circumstances and even the “unwanted effects” of policies that are underway. We start from what is put forward by “situational strategic planning” (SSP) and we have “satisfactors” as a horizon. These factors are set up publicly and are important elements that “put life in the center,” as feminist and other movements demand. That is to say, they create efficient social economy policies, for and with people.

Some alternative movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries offer steps to follow with these liberatory forms. Rather than the “dominant values” that aim to define, from the “scientific community” what is good and what is bad, we are always more interested in movements about “learning in order to transform, and transforming in order to learn” (Nuñez, 1989), etc. – movements that “undo” and overflow initial considerations because their creativity does not allow them to be foreseeable, or to be subjected to any preset program. It is not that “reversion” or “undoing” goes explicitly against what has been instituted but that by being more consistent with formal declarations than the authorities themselves; it overflows them and puts into practice what others say and do not do. It is in these practices where we all learn from what escapes our control, from the great complexity of life and of emerging processes. For this reason the first indicator will be that all groups and people can learn from the creative innovations that we are constructing, and that is why it is not possible to follow preset molds or channels. “Patriarchal styles” are at the heart of the hierarchized and authoritarian forms that are blocking the emergence of human creativity. It is also about leaving behind sectarianisms that are too ideological, since the aim is to enjoy more the journey together than the writing of programs, which we do not know whether they will be carried out.

We have to be able to make the most of the initiatives that arise constantly from the relationships among people, since it is from the constructive energy of groups and of people that we can make “participatory democracies.” Not only democracies so that the majority of those who vote feel represented but also so that groups who self-organize in daily life see that their initiatives can contribute to improving their lives. Certain “self (eco)-organized” democracies are ones that, like ecosystems, make use of the contributions of the creatures, large and small, that they are composed of. The ecological self-organization of systems of relationships, among all their components, is a very good model, as against what is involved in the delegation of bureaucratized electoral systems. Many women’s movements around the world are teaching us to work with democratic styles, starting with daily life, from the smallest, and how to transform the world from the micro to the macro. Workers’ movements and those striving for decolonization are also important models, and they have constructed force ideas that are horizontal, inclusive, and transformational. Not just dilemmas within the system, but much more: the construction of other, emerging plans, where force ideas can be constructed in a participatory way; these force ideas would be able to mobilize and to coordinate, contributing comprehensiveness to processes.

In order to complete the table, we participate with the current “alter-globalization” movements, which have very different meanings and goals, that offer the construction of “emerging” potentialities as opposed to the dominant values. As against “post-truths” and stories that are used to create fears, the securities of specific experiences of “good living together,” which are now becoming movements, are offered. Also, “grassroots democracies” and inclusive social mobilizations against the dictatorships of “financialized globalization.”

We do not know what alternatives have a future, but we build because “other worlds are possible” based on the radical criticism of the circulation of capital, patriarchal hierarchy, and unquestioned dogmas. We propose “transducing” the “cries” of parts of the world in order to learn to “build paths” that are emerging after the downfall of the “empire.” That there be a plurality of “reversive overflows,” rehearsing different ways of starting out on diverse “emerging” pathways, as against what has been called “dominant value equivalents.” This is something that encourages us both in the everyday and in the direction of global transformation.

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Social Transformation Through Supervision in Participatory Action Research



Ainhoa Berasaluze , Maddalen Epelde-Juaristi , Miren Ariño-Altuna , and Charo Ovejas-Lara 

Abstract In this chapter we present a new research model, which we call the *PARS* model. It represents a synergy between participatory action research (PAR) and supervision: Participatory Action Research Supervision (PARS).

Social work professionals confront a reality characterized by inequalities and social injustices that stymie any form of democracy. In this context, the action-research methodology presented in this paper aims to generate commitments to participatory and democratic processes, community development, and social cohesion.

The research process itself has led to transformations, notably in terms of the dialogue and effective collaboration between academics and professionals. It has been demonstrated that alternative, constructionist, and critical-reflexive forms of knowledge are possible. These alternative models are far removed from the positivist paradigm which is part of the heritage of the social sciences in their most instrumental and pragmatic expression.

The first part of the chapter outlines the theoretical basis of the *PARS* model, including its epistemological foundation, methodology, and application. In the second part of the chapter, the application of this model in a specific investigation is described. This investigation was a collaboration between the School of Social Work at the University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU and the Department of Social Services of the Vitoria-Gasteiz City Council. The research aims to promote strategies that contribute to the improvement and transformation of the professional practice of social work, as well as the living conditions and coexistence of citizens in our local context.

Keywords Social work · Methodology · Social services · Dialogue

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1 Introduction: The *PARS* Model, or How to Investigate Through Supervision

The paucity of collaboratively produced knowledge encouraged us to delve into a model that challenges the hegemonic logic of scientific production. We propose an alternative that is collaborative and inclusive and that overcomes the knowing-doing dichotomy. It is a further strategy for deepening democracy and social transformation.

This preamble serves to contextualize the *Participatory Action Research Supervision* model (hereinafter, the *PARS* model) that we propose and its epistemic and methodological framework (Fig. 1).

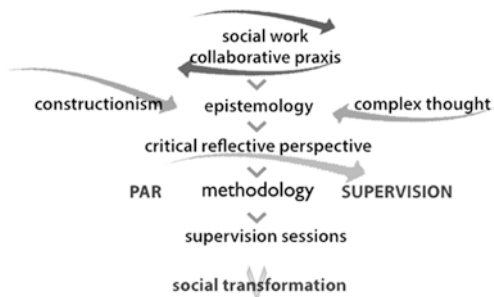
By bringing together research and supervision, we aim to contribute to the generation of more effective responses to the challenges present in our increasingly complex and uncertain contemporary reality. Sociologist Helmut Willke signals a need for new forms of state governance. He draws attention to supervision in the context of knowledge societies (2012) and the important role of professional associations of supervisors, as well as social workers, in public policy contexts.

In this sense, the *PARS* model aims to promote strategies that contribute to social and political reflection and to a transformation of professional practices as well, improving the living conditions and coexistence of citizens in our social context.

The body of work which has had most influence on the methodological and epistemological development of the *PARS* model is based on a constructionist paradigm. This is linked to complex thinking and general systems theory, prioritizing critical and reflexive perspectives. As to the methodology, *Participatory Action Research* (hereinafter, *PAR*) is proposed as a form of research action and, in turn, as a methodology for intervention and social transformation. We find analogies between *PAR* and supervision in social work, as both represent ways of investigating and building knowledge from action embedded in a reflexive and participatory process.

This chapter describes the *PARS* model in terms of theory, together with its practical application in a specific research project. The aim of this project was to advance toward a resignification of difficulties and strategies with respect social work carried out by the social services department of the local city council. The chapter

Fig. 1 Epistemic and methodological framework of *PARS* model. (Source: authors, based on material adapted from Alonso, 1998; López & Bach, 2016; Mayring, 2000; Conde, 2010)



concludes by recounting the principal findings. This has been a collaborative work that has fostered a space for reflection and the construction of knowledge. It has aimed to widen narrow perspectives, enhance the professional effectiveness of social work, guide social policymaking, and evaluate existing premises and processes. Ultimately, it seeks to transform social reality not just for but also with socially disadvantaged people.

This model updates participatory social work and reflects on participatory forms of knowledge generation, thus legitimizing a collaborative praxis whose ultimate purpose is the search for knowledge and transformative action built collectively by social action workers together with research personnel.

2 The *PARS* Model

2.1 Epistemological Guidelines: Re-constructing Knowledge and Action in Critical-Reflexive Complexity

In this chapter we present the theoretical bases, methodology, and techniques that make up the *PARS* model. The theoretical bases are informed by the schools of complex thought, social constructionism, and the critical-reflective perspective. With respect to methodology, participatory action research and supervision are key. Finally, the applied qualitative techniques used were supervision sessions, content analysis, and discourse analysis.

2.1.1 Social Constructionism

The construction of knowledge is the result of sociocultural processes and exchanges and is determined by the cultures and stories shared by a community. According to Gergen, the words with which we understand the world that surrounds us are “social artifacts, the product of exchanges between historically situated people. Therefore, one form of understanding prevails over another as the result of agreements within a community that, sustaining and supporting one form, excludes others” (1985, 271).

A constructionist epistemology favors a perspective and a being-doing with others in spaces of exchange in which the meanings that we attribute to different situations are understood as dialogic constructions and reconstructions. These emerge from social interactions, mediated by language and the consensus and dissent present in a given culture. The diverse realities that we inhabit are constructions that in turn construct us. In our case, the particular culture and reality that interest us are that of social work.

In the *PARS* model, one particular point of focus is how difficulties, responses, and proposals are constructed socially and culturally in such a way as that they emerge as alternatives for understanding, action, and participation in a collaborative

praxis of social work. As Kisnerman points out, “to deconstruct is to determine the factors involved in creating a problematic situation, and which preconceptions, representations, prejudices, and assumptions are operating as barriers or obstacles when trying to move, from this constructed situation, to a less problematic reconstruction through new practices” (1998, 148).

From a constructionist paradigm, we are committed to research understood as a dynamic, critical, reflective, and collaborative process of creation in complex contexts. We support participatory research whose ethics, philosophy, characteristics, and procedures are more coherent with the subjects, objectives, strategies, values, and principles of social work.

2.1.2 Complex Thinking

As Xavier Montagud details, complex thinking aims “to find or construct results that are useful in the context in which they are produced and with the purpose they pursue, while keeping in mind that the complexity of reality allows for many possible alternatives” (2015, 10). We approach complex thinking along the same lines as Edgard Morin (2005), for whom it brings together a series of principles shared with social constructionism. These include the following:

- The principle of participatory democracy: This brings together the experiences and capacities of all people, defending a model of life that understands freedom as a responsibility and is responsive to social issues.
- The principle of complexity: This recognizes interrelationships between different systems and situations. The whole is more than the sum of its parts.
- Principle of circular feedback: This states that a cause acts on an effect and this in turn on the cause (multiple causality).
- The principle of self-organization: This recognizes that situations are shaped by complex dialogues between internal and external systemic logics. Systems in a constant state of flux are forced to reorganize, to move from order to disorder, and vice versa. It is a capacity for self-organization that makes it possible to maintain a certain internal balance in changing contexts.
- The principle of local-historical context: This places knowledge within a social and collective framework. It warns us against a belief in the existence of an asymmetry between the supposed authority and rationality of the university and the supposed dependency or even ignorance of citizens and even practicing professionals.
- The principle of meaning: This centers attention on language as the means par excellence for the construction of social life.
- The principle of non-objectivity: This recognizes the observer is present in all observations, and therefore neither objectivity nor neutrality are possible.

2.1.3 Critical-Reflective Perspective

A critical and reflective perspective goes beyond instrumental rationality. This is because to know is to recognize and progress in the sense of doing more than seeing the perspective of the other as an object and instead recognizing it as a subject (Santos, 2003). From this perspective, it is understood that the action of objectification is a reflexive action, a process of construction that recognizes the complexity of the object of the social sciences: complexly dialogical, self-referential, and geohistorically and politically contextualized. Nothing is an exact or correct representation of a given reality. Objectivity can only be a result of the action of objectifying a set of conventions, beliefs, assumptions, and options that operate in a particular setting.

Social work seeks to reconstruct collaborative professional development, termed “dialogic conversations” and “reflecting teams” by Anderson (1987, 1997) respectively. These spaces can generate “alternative stories that permit the emergence and incorporation of new meanings, building with them more desirable possibilities, new meanings that people will experience and recognize as more useful and satisfying” (White & Epston, 1993, 31).

Knowledge guided by a reflexive practice (Schön, 1983) is always unfinished, since it is constantly reconstructed. In our case, we understand this as collaborative praxis oriented to discovery and change through dialogue.

2.2 *Methodological and Technical Frameworks: Toward a Dialogical and Collaborative Construction*

We opted for a qualitative methodology consistent with participatory action research, including supervision as a variant of this methodology. Based on this approach, various qualitative techniques were deployed. These included supervision sessions, content analysis, and discourse analysis.

2.2.1 Participatory Action Research

We understand that *PAR* is the research methodology most appropriate for an engagement with social work, its objects, objectives, social function, and ethical principles sanctioned in 2018 by the International Federation of Social Workers (*IFSW*).

Bradbury et al. (2008) note that *PAR* researchers join together “with leading-edge professionals to apply scientifically derived knowledge to practical problems and promote a democratic and egalitarian social order, underpinned by ethical values” (2008, 78). From our perspective, we would also draw attention to the possibility of overcoming the theory-practice binomial and the separation of the research

system and the system researched. This facilitates a construction of collective knowledge based on professional practice itself. Action research investigates by reconstructing the situations it observes, composing and sharing meanings and actions for change (Kisnerman, 1998).

PAR in social work is also a means to step away from a positivist linear conception based on professional *help*, to make space for a praxis based on a cooperative relationship between professionals and citizens: a participatory commitment to face current problems that does not take existing social conditions for granted.

2.2.2 Supervision

The PARS model incorporates supervision as a variant of participatory action research. As defended by Professor Teresa Zamanillo, it is a “particular way of investigating, a complementary method for action-research, a way of reflecting and experimenting on the conceptual framework, a method for the application of praxis-based theory” (Zamanillo, 2008, 322–323).

Supervision in social work as a methodology for reflection on professional practice “offers professionals from social services teams an opportunity to improve their professional skills through reflection, thought and self-care” (Puig, 2011, 48). In addition, it provides a space for training, analysis, shared reflection, and construction of knowledge based on an approach to complexity that professional practice demands (Aragones, 2010).

Therefore, we understand supervision as a space for critical and constructive reflection on professional practice. It is a space to rebuild situated knowledge, an encounter based on collaborative dialogues (Anderson & Swim, 1995) and a shared territory to investigate. According to Casement (1985; as cited in Ferguson, 2018), supervised people develop “the capacity to reflect, self-analyze and contain themselves when interacting with service users, (...). The supervisee learns in supervision to see how they are as a practitioner and watch themselves as well as the client” (418) (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 Supervision in social work. (Source: authors)



Berasaluze and Ariño (2014) define supervision as a “process of reflection on professional practice, a meta-position holding a mirror to professional practice that allows us to contemplate situations with enhanced perspective and clarity. This means revisiting what has already been said and constructing new perspectives with the purpose of learning and generating action strategies” (2014, 106). Our research fits within this definition, understanding supervision as a space for collaborative dialogues, mutual learning, and shared construction, based on mutual and horizontal relationships.

2.2.3 Qualitative Techniques

We sought to deploy the technical instruments most appropriate for dialogue, understanding, reconstruction, and a transformation of the praxis of social work. We opted for a triangulation of qualitative techniques including supervision sessions, content analysis, and discourse analysis.

- *Supervision sessions*

Supervised group sessions are analogous to focus groups in some respects. They try to elicit conversations that approach everyday contexts. Although the groups involved are artificial, they reorganize a given social situation by producing a text in context. This text is later analyzed through content and discourse analysis. This methodology aims to uncover meanings that can be collectively identified. It also considers each participant to be active in the process and in a horizontal relationship with other participants and researchers (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

Perhaps the most relevant difference is that in supervision sessions the group dialogues spontaneously and freely. The objective is to generate communication and information, rather than obtain it. By contrast, focus groups partake in planned conversations, designed to obtain information. Importantly, supervision sessions involve the same group of people (between 6 and 12 people) during several sessions (six to nine sessions) over a period of time (between 6 months and 1 year).

In our methodology, the group participating in supervisory sessions becomes a group engaged in collaborative dialogue. The intention is to engage in analysis from a critical and reflexive consciousness, with the intention of reconstructing discourses and improving and transforming practices. Meta-supervision sessions complemented and supported these supervision sessions. The objective of these was to cast an analytical gaze over the work carried out in supervision sessions. It constituted supervision of the supervision itself.

- *Content analysis*

Although this technique was originally designated for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the material content of communication, today it refers to a set of methods and procedures for document analysis that place an emphasis on the meaning of a text. Qualitative content analysis is defined within this framework as an approach to the analysis of texts in communication spaces,

controlled methodologically (Mayring, 2000). It is about interpreting the material under investigation with the help of analytical categories, which identify areas of interest.

The primary contribution of this technique to the *PARS* model is its usefulness in generating analytical categories for the systematization of information from information registers. In this case, both the semantic and the pragmatic utilities of the technique are fundamental.

- *Discourse analysis*

Discourse analysis focuses on processes and is confined to the social practice of verbalization (Van Dijk, 1977). It understands language not as a reflection or representation of the world but as action and social construction. Discourse analysis, understood as the construction of knowledge and also as part of processes of change, connects discursive practices with social structures (Ibáñez, 2000). Discourse analysis as social praxis and as a complex and relational construct seeks to reconstruct other possible meanings (Bateson, 1972).

In the analysis of professional discourses, intra-professional discourse is prioritized, that is, discourse within specific professions. Belonging to a discursive community is made evident in the use of shared conventions that mark and follow the norms of that community, its epistemology, ideology, and social ontology. Some categories have to do with a particular discursive genre, such as professional activity, cognitive world, discursive community, pragmatic objective, or specific interlocutor (López & Bach, 2016).

Discourse analysis involves critical analysis by category. Texts are analyzed in context, based on analytical categories or codes that organize the approach to the reality observed. The purpose of these categories is to conceptualize the text and facilitate the resulting theoretical construction-explication. This process is drawn from grounded theory, and more specifically, what Charmaz (2005) describes as a new interpretation of “social constructionist grounded theory.” This variant understands that those categories and theories are not absolute but constructed by researchers.

Setting out from the epistemological framework and methodology described above, we have attempted to achieve a kind of integration between content and discourse analysis. This comprises the structure of the methodological process of the *PARS* model, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Structure of methodological processes in the *PARS* model

Content analysis (CA)	<i>PARS</i> methodological structure (CA+DA)	Discourse analysis (DA)
1. Notes taken after fieldwork	1. Selection of the object of analysis	1. Selection of the object of analysis
2. Literal transcription of the discursive material	2. Notes taken at each supervision session	2. Pre-analysis
3. Ascertaining the order of reading the corpus of texts	3. Literal transcription of each supervision session	3. Definition of the units of analysis
4. Open and literal reading of the text	4. Reading of the transcription of each session according to codes	4. Setting up rules of analysis and codes of classification
5. Fragmentation of the text or integrated approach	5. Pre-analysis at each session	5. Creation of categories
6. Pre-analytical conjectures	6. Elaboration of pre-analytical conjectures and categories	6. Final integration of findings
7. Guided reading(s)	7. Guided reading	7. Reconstruction of new meanings favourable to change
8. Codification	8. Final integration and reconstruction of findings	
9. Annotations of the text		
10. Validation of conjectures		

Source: authors, based on material adapted from Alonso (1998), López and Bach (2016), Mayring (2000), and Conde (2010)

3 Application of the *PARS* Model in Research on Social Work in a Local Government Social Services Unit

In this section we present a research process carried out using the *PARS* model. This covers the structure, development, and contents of each stage of research and the most relevant findings with respect to core difficulties and possible strategies for change.

The project involved reflection and collective participatory research through a group made up of four academics and nine professionals. It aimed to improve the professional practice of social work in the context of a local social services unit, through the constructive resignification of difficulties and the development of strategic lines of action aimed at social change.

The initiative was carried out over 15 months, from September 2018 to March 2020. It deployed the methodological process outlined above. Nine supervision sessions were held, in which each of the participating professionals presented a situation derived from their professional practice. All the sessions were recorded and transcribed, with the aim of identifying the main difficulties felt and expressed by the participating professionals in their daily practice, as well as their proposals for improvement.

In this way, the supervision sessions facilitated a reflection on difficulties and opportunities for improvement. The content generated was systematized through

the application of both content analysis and discourse analysis techniques, which promoted the construction and reconstruction of professional praxis.

On the basis of the summary of the process shown in Table 1, we now go into more detail with respect to each stage of the research cycle. Finally, we describe some of the most relevant conclusions reached over the course of the investigation.

3.1 Structure of the Methodological Process in PARS Research

- *Selecting the object of analysis*

The professional practice of social work in a local social services unit was the object of analysis in this research. Reflection on the praxis of social work was carried out in order to resignify everyday difficulties and reflect on possible alternatives of action to overcome these and improve professional practice.

In order to carry out the analysis and reflect on professional praxis, nine collective supervision sessions were held. In each session, professionals presented a specific difficult situation drawn from their personal professional experience to the group, which was then discussed.

The *difficult professional situations* presented in the supervision sessions were also written up in a live document that was reviewed and updated after each of the sessions. This facilitated learning, the emergence of new concepts, reflections, and/or action strategies. The documents were re-constructed through the use of a series of codes. These codes were structured along the six axes of analysis-reflection which were established as the pre-analytical categories of the research (Berasaluze & Ariño, 2014, 109):

- Contextual-organizational axis. This reflects on relationships between a dilemma or difficulty and contextual variables. These variables might be cultural, economic, political, or legislative, but they might also be organizational in the context of a social services unit. We believe that organizational context can represent an opportunity and/or obstacle.
- Technical-methodological axis. This addresses the technical and methodological factors impacting on the difficult professional situation under discussion. It considers different options that these factors can include and exclude and positive and negative impacts that they can produce.
- Intrapersonal axis. This refers fundamentally to how a situation affects people personally, in terms of professional practice and their social role and identity. It queries which aspects of this impact allow us to advance and which do not.
- Interpersonal axis. In the practice of social work, different points of view and even confrontation can occur around differences in analysis and the deployment of alternative possible strategies. Conflict can occur in relations between a social worker and a client and their peers. It can also occur within social work teams, where collaboration can create synergies or, alternatively, become an impediment

to reaching agreements about the management of a particular case. This axis addressed these concerns.

- Epistemological axis. This axis reflects on knowledge (concepts, theories, models, etc.). It considers needs in this area in order to better understand and overcome difficulties.
- Ethical-ideological axis. This axis addresses ethical-philosophical principles and aspects of ideology which influence understanding, analysis and the selection of strategies for improvement and change with respect to a specific difficult situation.

- *Notes from each monitoring session*

In each supervision session, the research team made up of research staff and social services professionals took notes. These notes were added to the description of the specific difficult professional situation under discussion. Each participant reconstructed the document based on their case, incorporating the contributions and reflective learning from each session.

In addition, within the teaching-research team, two participants took on the role of participating observers. They took notes on everything that happened in the sessions.

- *Verbatim transcription of each supervision session*

All sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for later observation, reading, and analysis.

- *Reading the transcripts of each session based on codes*

The transcripts were studied and analyzed to identify concepts and contents related to the axes of analysis-reflection detailed above. This systematization of relevant and reiterated concepts and content was used to re-construct the pre-analytical conjectures throughout the process.

- *Development of the pre-analysis in each supervision session*

In each supervision session, we conducted pre-analysis with three objectives: to bring together the documents or content corpus involved, to formulate guidelines for the analysis, and to establish indicators or codes that showed up issues present in the material analyzed.

- *Making pre-analytical conjectures and categories*

The pre-analytical conjectures or hypotheses and analytical categories were revisited in analysis meetings after each supervision session. These were then revisited in sessions with social services professionals and in the meta-supervision sessions.

This analysis built up general sense around the content of the transcribed texts and dialogues in relation to the objectives of the research and with respect to relevant critical theory. The reading and rereading of the research materials involved

making hypotheses that deliberately brought us closer to understanding the discourses, in a movement from description to interpretation.

- *Oriented reading*

For the reconstruction of analytical hypotheses, documentary review and discussion were carried out in analysis and contrast meetings in supervision and meta-supervision sessions.

After the free reading of the research materials, we carried out a second directed or intentional reading in order to evaluate the hypotheses and develop more elaborated and specific meanings. This process took advantage of the *annotations to the text* that each researcher added to the margins of writings collected in the supervision sessions and related to the conjectures and the categories of analysis. Through these means, we constructed several lines of argument from which to draw conclusions.

- *Integration and final reconstruction of the findings*

As a final step, findings were drawn up. In this case, this included the construction of new meanings favorable to change. The most relevant conclusions are described below.

3.2 *Basic Conclusions of the Research*

3.2.1 *Core Difficulties*

The core difficulties identified through the research were recognized by all participants in the study. This achievement was valued positively, insofar as it helps to better understand certain insecurities related to the daily practice of social work in a local social services unit. Four principal difficulties were identified as a result of the process of generating hypothesis based on the dialogue and materials worked on in the supervision sessions, as well as in the subsequent analysis meetings. These are detailed below.

- *The excessive standardization and bureaucratization that characterizes social services contributes to the de-skilling and de-professionalization of social work*

Standardization and bureaucratization is a structural trend in public administrations in general and social services in particular. The complexity involved in social work interventions exposes a system full of insecurities and uncertainties. This system tends to turn rules and bureaucracy into basic tools from which it derives power, security, and control. Norms, protocols, and procedures are emplaced in the instrumental toolkit of social work professionals, to the detriment and exclusion of their own theoretical-methodological frameworks and the abandonment of a more natural, collaborative praxis with citizens. If participation and transdisciplinary scientific knowledge no longer guide us in our professional practice and instead we raise

rules and bureaucracy to the status of science, we are doomed to the de-skilling and de-professionalization of social work. Social work personnel are converted into technicians of social interventions, understood more as aseptic exercises than as collaborative praxis or democratic and critical actions.

In the research we found evidence to support various hypotheses already raised by other authors. The dynamics identified put us at risk and must therefore be taken seriously and addressed on different fronts. In this regard, the main conclusions make reference to situations in which bureaucratic management and processing from a protectionist and technocratic position lead to de-professionalization. This generates learned helplessness, conformity, and low self-esteem in social work professionals (Hernández-Echegaray, 2019).

Linked to this difficulty, the following participative constructions resulting from the research should be noted:

- An overly protectionist institutional conception focused on control of spending promotes the expansion of welfare administration functions. This converts the management and processing of resources into a disproportionately demanding task in social services.
- The processing of resources is a fundamental task of social services and part of social action. However, inadequate coordination, organization, and planning together with the sheer scale of management demanded means that it ends up becoming a demotivating burden for professionals.
- Bureaucratization brings with it arduous and grinding work processes that contribute to overload and a loss of creativity and critical reflection. Additionally, excessive standardization imposes a protocolization of intervention processes. This confuses administrative procedure with effective professional practice.
- Qualified male and female social workers go through a second period of professional evolution at the hands of the social services system. This survivalist style training is a type of pseudo-behaviorist socialization centered on case and resource management.
- *The assimilation of social work by social services leads to an agglutinated system that puts professional identity at risk*

In the evolution and development of social services, we observe an increasingly *orderly* and standardized system, which is less flexible and leaves less space for creativity. This makes it more difficult to carry out the critical and dynamic social work that is better adapted to taking advantage of opportunities that emerge in the dynamic terrain of citizenship and social change. The social work system progressively comes to resemble an *agglutinated system* (Minuchin & Fishman, 2004). These systems may be characterized as follows: They have diffused borders or limits, and there is a confusion of the social services system with the social work system, a lack of freedom and autonomy, loss of identity, excessive dependence, an abandonment of social justice concerns, and a confusion of objects, objectives, roles, functions, and tasks. A number of authors have described “the servitude that work methods imposed by social services entails for social work” (Pelegrí, 2014, 12).

The conclusions of our research only place more emphasis on this idea of servitude. They also identify some specific dynamics and situations that demand a response. These include the assimilation of social work by the social services system. The praxis of social work is mediated ideologically, technically, and procedurally by its institutionalization. This can induce an abuse of power and certain asymmetric relationships (superior-inferior), without taking into account the importance of the two-way collaboration that recognizes that people are “experts in their own lives.” “To take for granted that subjects are ignorant is to cultivate a passion for ignorance” (González & Rodríguez, 2020, 147). Some other conclusions in this regard:

- The assimilation of social work by the social services system puts at risk the quality of care and marginalizes reflexive and collaborative social work. This produces a distorted and often negative image of social workers as figures of control, rather than of collaboration and support. This can lead to the disengagement of people being misread as refusal or resistance to abide by the rules, or even as resistance to accepting the best wishes of professionals. This in turn can evolve into an abuse of power or “euphemization of violence” (Bourdieu, 1991) concealed or masked behind the mandates of the system.
- In terms of the experience of social workers, our feminized socio-professional status is already fragile as “social care and assistance, while fulfilling essential economic and social functions, is still not perceived as a path to social and professional success” (Lorente & Luxardo, 2018, 105). The dynamics of servitude mentioned earlier is an aggravating factor.
- There is no participatorily constructed, recognized, and shared theoretical-methodological framework for social work in the social services system. The methodologies deployed respond to the instruments and regulations of the system rather than the decisions and professional strategies of workers.
- Population labels and expert diagnoses (unilateral rather than participatory) impede the collaborative construction of strategies for change and improvement.
- *The disciplinary weakness of social work leaves professionals in a vulnerable and fragile position when facing both the social services system and the demands of their work with the public*

It has become clear over the course of this research process that social work has been weakened both professionally and as a discipline. It represents a body of knowledge in need of further epistemological depth and professional action (Zamanillo, 2008). Given the paucity of knowledge useful in terms of daily professional practice, the rules of the social services system come to determine the *what* and *how* of professional duties. With respect to the demands of users and society, in the absence of a common theoretical-methodological-technical framework, professional praxis, as we have already indicated, becomes administrative and instrumental in nature. It is basically reduced to the allocation and management of resources.

This disciplinary weakness becomes manifest in a number of areas. These include the complexity of its object; the underdevelopment of an analysis that takes

into account the parameters of social work and the participation of users and citizens; the vulnerable position of our profession within the institutional system; the inadequate development of disciplinary and transdisciplinary instruments and techniques more responsive to processes of democratization in a given time and place; language excessively constrained by established categories; a lack of research around social work and collaboration between universities, professionals, and local communities; the commodification of resources; and a lack of collaboration through networks. Authors such as Zamanillo (2008) allude to the marginal status of the theoretical-practical heritage of social work. This is due on the one hand to an emphasis on practice and, on the other, to a relative lack of theory directly engaged with this practice. We advocate for a disciplinary logic that transcends a disjointed, solipsistic discipline and that, from both solidarity and transdisciplinarity, produces knowledge for social transformation.

With respect to the demands made by society in general on our profession, we have found that social work limited to interventions with individuals or families makes the *social question* invisible. This impedes a critical analysis of disaffection and social disadvantage. In the words of Zamanillo and Martín, “the silence on the structural factors that produce and reproduce inequity, poverty and social exclusion is alarming. We think that an emphasis on individual-family social work must not be to the detriment of, or substitute for, community based social work” (2011, 111). Further points related to the question of fragility include the following:

- There is a lack of research in terms of both theory and applied studies. Models of social work are not sufficiently developed, which in turn mean that case assessments are based fundamentally on administrative protocols (administrative diagnoses) and not so much on professional criteria.
- The use of crystallized concepts to define situations or problems hinders collaborative dialogues based on freedom and two-way relationships. This leads to greater difficulties when evaluating the processes and results constructed through professional praxis in collaboration with individuals and the public.
- Confronted by historical-social complexity, multiple and diverse demands, and citizens trained to see only the availability of resources, professionals find themselves forced to resist the quick and easy option of conceding to proposals and requests that have been touched up in order to qualify for particular resources. These requests need to be resisted in order to make space for alternative responses based on social reconstruction in response to a collective demand, in accordance with social work criteria.
- Displays of discomfort, frustration, insecurities, fear, etc. could have more to do with the position social services hold in the overall system and with a certain marginality as a discipline and in terms of social status weakness than with personal emotional fragility.
- *The exercise of social work puts into play the whole human being who practices the profession*

The different supervision sessions revealed that professionals need to establish links or relationships with individuals, families, groups, and/or the community to properly carry out their work. These relationships need to be based on empathy, trust, acceptance, reciprocity, and horizontality. To create these relationships, in addition to expertise and technical skills, there is a need for authenticity demonstrated through the involvement and commitment of the professional. This involves intrapersonal work and the development and construction of a personal-professional identity, through reflexivity, self-knowledge, self-criticism, and ethical-epistemological engagement. This demands commitment by professionals and also of the institutions in which they practice their profession. Professionals are not always aware of, or can be perhaps reluctant or unable to undertake, work that is necessary in this respect. Institutions, with their utilitarian and short-term perspectives, do not often demonstrate a willingness to engage in this area. As a result of this, further difficulties arise:

- Bonds and relationships are themselves processes that transform both members of the public and professionals. These connections must necessarily be founded on freedom, trust, mutuality, and complementarity. They must therefore be understood as the axis of social work praxis.
- A relationship that responds to these premises should not take on inappropriate responsibilities handed over from public institutions. Neither should it limit itself to assistencialistic and asymmetrical practices.
- The emotional discomfort observed (frustration, insecurity, fear, loneliness, suffering, etc.) also indicates a need to care for professionals as people. It should not be forgotten that some work, personal, and professional factors (isolation, work stress, loneliness, non-shared responsibility, inadequate spaces, a lack of recognition, hierarchical subordination, etc.) do not favor personal well-being or professional development.
- Elements drawn from the personal sphere such as values, experiences, etc. are present in professional relationships, which provoke, on many occasions, conflicts of values, control exercised as assistance, transfers and counter-transfers, etc., and ethical dilemmas between different principles: autonomy and freedom against dependence and protectionism, etc.

3.2.2 Strategies for change

The identification of core difficulties has helped us to better understand social workers' experiences in social services, as well as the conditions and consequences of their current professional practice. On the basis of this process of analysis, the entire research team met together to develop some strategic lines for action-transformation. Three basic strategies or areas were identified for the improvement of social work in local social services. Each area contains a set of actions designed for the realization of material changes. The three areas together with their corresponding sets of actions are summarized below.

- *Professional self-care is only possible through the construction of one's own professional identity, on the basis of personal and professional development*

One of the lines of action proposed is linked to personal-professional care and self-care, due to the importance of this in moving toward change and improvement. This was verified in the analysis of difficulties. Some actions proposed include:

- The generation of spaces for reflection and professional exchange, by way of self-training and a collective construction of knowledge. The idea is to produce knowledge to transform the living conditions and coexistence of citizens.
- The incorporation of professional supervision (group and/or team) in the annual plans of the organizations, on a voluntary and rotating basis.
- Improving the functioning and cohesion of work teams, understood as support for professionals, through leadership training for team leaders and a redefinition of team meetings. Beyond their role as forums for the simple transmission of information, these should become spaces to develop criteria, evaluate actions, and address the relational dynamics of the team.
- The inclusion of social work professionals in supervisory and policymaking roles.
- *Strengthening social work demands reviewing, rebuilding, and extending the corpus of knowledge around social work, including theoretical models, methodologies, and techniques*

In this second area, we address aspects related to the discipline of social work and its need for reinforcement. While this area may perhaps be that which requires the most effort and dedication, it is also the one that can produce the most wide-ranging changes in the discipline. Some possible actions were identified:

- The elaboration of a theoretical-methodological-technical framework for social work in local social service units that incorporates democratic mechanisms for participation-action related to justice and the well-being of citizens
- The adaptation of ongoing training specific to the discipline of social work
- The training of social work professionals to work as supervisors
- The development of research based on PAR methodologies in collaboration between academia and practicing professionals, both about and for social work
- The transfer of knowledge and professional practices
- *Responding to social issues requires the participation of citizens and reflexive and critical praxis on the part of social workers, in order to develop strategies for democratization and social transformation*

This third strategy is related to a need not to lose sight of wider social issues. The structural genesis of social inequalities was reiterated throughout the process of reflection and analysis involved in this study. Some of the actions proposed included:

- The generation of spaces for citizen participation
- Drawing attention to contexts and circumstances that generate violations of social rights, and in doing so shifting the burden of blame and responsibility

- The differentiation of social services and social work systems, clarifying issues such as social function, objects, objectives, methodologies, techniques, limits, jurisdictions, etc. in accordance with values, priorities, subjects, and processes that prioritize inclusive and transformative social action
- The improvement of the organization and planning of services and welfare payments and the simplification of bureaucratic-administrative procedures
- A more reasonable adjustment of staff-client ratios, workloads, and the distribution of responsibilities in work teams
- Compliance with legislation around social services and a guarantee of sufficient funding

4 Conclusions: Light on the Horizon of Participatory Action Research Supervision

Whoever reasons, Mairena declares, affirms the existence of a fellow human, a need for dialogue, and the possibility of mental communion between people. But reason, a Socratic invention, is not enough to create human coexistence. This also requires cordial communion, a convergence of hearts in the same object of love. To abolish dialogue is to renounce, in short, human reason (Machado, 1989).

As an ethical imperative, we understand that in social work there is no research without participation. Context is established through dialogic collaboration, which Paolo Freire might identify as dialogic actions of “authentic communion.” These “promote understanding, cultural creation and freedom” (1975, 67). To paraphrase Mijaíl Bakhtin (1993), it is in dialogue between people that meanings are constructed as a result of a collective reflection.

We began our work on the *PARS* model on the basis of these principles, seeking to combine research and action. We sought to base the process on collaboration and positive reconstruction, in order to offer an alternative to positivist research. This alternative revitalizes participatory action and the search for paths toward social transformation. We understand supervision as an option that responds to the methodological, ontological, and ethical considerations detailed above. As such, it can contribute to social work as an academic discipline and as a practice within a social services unit.

This model aims to realize critical-reflexive analysis with respect to a series of aspects and commitments, through observation and self-observation. These aspects include, among others, the question of who is involved; what responsibilities we share and the importance of context; how we name and rename difficulties and dilemmas and with what theoretical-practical frameworks; the effects of our choices, expectations, emotions, and decisions and those of the people with whom we work; how the theory and practice of social work come together; what regulations and procedures affect decision-making and the development of strategies for action and change; which rules regulate and/or constrain the profession; and how we

understand social issues and the breach between working with individuals and addressing wider social issues.

The application of the *PARS* model in research on the improvement of social work in a local social services unit revealed the potential of this methodology, both from the perspective of the process, since it has facilitated learning and a reconstruction of knowledge for all participants, and from the perspective of constructive collaboration in specific social work contexts. Through an application of the *PARS* model, we offered an alternative to the focus on individual knowledge. We jointly engaged in a process of resignification that produced shifts which are a step toward making psychosocial changes necessary for the effective professional practice of social work. However, we do not pretend that our work is neither generalizable nor trans-historical. Instead, it is shared knowledge produced within its historical and geopolitical context.

Finally, it is important to recognize that this is laborious research process, which requires a significant commitment from the participants. Even so, we reaffirm our opinion as to the ultimate value of the project. As is the case with social work, we know that our fate is to always be *under construction*, moving toward democratic social transformation.

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Exploring Analytical Tools for Democratic Deepening: Intersectionality in Our Research



Uxue Zugaza Goienetxea , Idoia Del Hoyo Moreno ,
and Miriam Ureta García 

Abstract In the context of *academic neoliberalism*, there is an urgent need to explore tools for critical analysis that can facilitate the development of research and knowledge-making processes that respond and actively contribute to projects of democratic deepening committed to social justice. This chapter responds to this need and explores the potential of intersectionality in this area. By approaching intersectionality as an *analytical sensibility*, this chapter explores the potential of an intersectional interpretive framework to generate knowledge practices that can make contributions to the design, implementation, and development of reflexive democratic deepening processes which take into account the complexity with which human relationships are interwoven with dynamics of domination and privilege. It does so by outlining different uses of intersectionality in the context of two research projects that have made up part of our professional research careers: *Unveiling Oppression and Resistance of Women in Zumarraga* and *Stigma at the Service of Power*. Through the diverse and complex uses that these projects have made of an intersectional interpretive framework, we demonstrate the potential of intersectionality and the analytical tools it deploys to identify and confront one-dimensional and disempowering perspectives on oppression. Through this process of reflection, the text delves into an approach which understands intersectionality as an open, reflexive, and complex tool essential for advancing toward a democratic deepening prioritizing social justice concerns. The ultimate conclusion reinforces the maxim that democratic deepening will be intersectional, or it will not be.

Keywords Intersectionality · Democratic deepening · Epistemic resistance · Social justice

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1 Introduction: Context and Objectives of the Proposal

In 2000, Patricia Hill Collins reissued *Black Feminist Thought*, a work in which this African-American sociologist traces the contours of the particular forms of knowledge of black women in the United States. In this work, the author describes the difficulties of researching the “subjugated knowledge” of these women with the standard tools of the social sciences (2000: 252). Collins refers specifically to the study of the point of view of African-American women and their “alternative” practices of development and validation of knowledge. In a different context, our research shares that author’s concerns about the absences and exclusions that the tools that we use *reproduce* in our research. Furthermore, these exclusions hinder emancipatory projects committed to inclusive democratic deepening oriented toward social justice. The premise guiding this approach is that “thinking domination from a dominated place” requires experimenting with complex tools (Ripio, 2019: 30). In the light of critical epistemologies, this invitation to reflexivity helps us understand that the tools—theories, methods, and concepts—that we use to think are themselves traversed by relations of domination. *Black Feminist Thought*, along with other works written from the “epistemic resistance” (Anzaldúa, 1987; Lorde, 1988; Harding, 1993; Quijano, 2000; Tuana, 2006; Lugones, 2008; Cabnal, 2010; Bidaseca, 2011; Ciriza, 2015), are examples of this call to place power at the center of our analyses and break “from past discriminatory practices that have served to rationalize and buttress systemic harm and inequality” (May, 2015: 12).

In the context of studies on participatory and deliberative democracy, several feminist thinkers have provided evidence as to the exclusionary nature of the normative genesis and practical application of proposals for democratic deepening. Critics have pointed out different ways in which these frameworks are traversed by relations of domination and epistemic power which, as Iris Marion Young (2000) intuited, reproduce exclusionary procedures even within different projects aimed at transformation and empowerment. Along these lines, we agree with Jone Martínez-Palacios when she states that democratic innovations are gendered, “but they are also traversed by systems structures of race, age, and a social class.” Mechanisms for deepening democracy are not decoupled from the social position occupied by the people producing them, or the dominant logics that have shaped the categories with which we think the world (Martínez-Palacios, 2017: 54). Intersectionality includes the idea that, in a given context, inequality is experienced and resisted at the intersection of gender, class, origin, race, age, language, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and/or empowerment, among other factors. Together with the authors cited above, for us a viewpoint from intersectionality also represents an input to enhance reflexive interventions with respect to the relations of domination inscribed on our way of approaching social reality and contribute to the creation of more inclusive, egalitarian, and fair democracies. The ideas in this chapter are indebted to and oriented by the dialogue between democratic deepening and intersectionality explored

in the monographs coordinated by Jone Martínez-Palacios and Patricia Martínez (2017) and Martínez-García and Martínez-Palacios (2019). In these, the authors inquire as to the possibilities of dialogue between democratic deepening and intersectionality, two frameworks seldom explored together but “closely related in their interest in nurturing social justice projects” (Martínez-Palacios & Martínez-García, 2017: 9). This proposal goes beyond the study of deliberative and participatory models of democracy from feminist perspectives. In the light cast by the “interpretive tool” of intersectionality (ibid.: 11), we are confronted by the strengths and limitations of the very analytical lenses from which we aspire to deepen democracy in inclusive terms (Martínez-Palacios, 2016). This reflection offers elements to deepen democracy in inclusive terms (Martínez-Palacios, 2016).

This chapter contributes to the framework proposed by Martínez-Palacios and Martínez-García and continues to explore different angles in these dialogues. As is Collins, we are convinced that intersectionality and democracy “are both aspirational social justice projects that take form through problem-solving and praxis” (2017: 21). Taking up the baton from Collins, this chapter explores some uses to which we have applied intersectionality in our own research and investigates the scope of intersectional praxis in the elaboration of knowledge. Specifically, the chapter aims to describe intersectionality as an “analytical sensibility” (Cho et al., 2013: 795). This can be useful for the development of knowledge that contributes to the design, implementation, and development of reflexive democratic deepening processes which take into account the complexity with which the relations of domination and privilege that we intend to deactivate are interwoven. As has already been noted, we explore this idea on the basis of the practical uses we have made of intersectionality in two of our own research projects.

The first, *Unveiling Oppressions and Resistances of Women in Zumarraga (Basque Country): An intersectional analysis in order to deepen democracy in terms of social justice* (hereinafter, *Unveiling Oppressions*), is a work that analyzes the logic of oppression and resistance of women in the town of Zumarraga (Basque Country) in a context of deindustrialization (Ahedo & Ureta, 2019).¹ The second, *Stigma at the service of power: Domination and resistance from intersectionality* (hereinafter, *Stigma*), addresses literature and public action around stigmatization

¹Research carried out in 2018. From a methodological point of view, core field work included 13 in-depth interviews with key informants from the volunteer, healthcare, technical, political, union, and educational sectors. Interviewees were identified by a coordinating group made up of political representatives and public servants. Through these interviews, the intersections of vulnerabilities that interviewees highlighted as most relevant were identified. On the basis of this information, a sample of 24 people was drawn up and a total of 17 women were interviewed. Finally, two participatory action research (PAR) workshops that sought to specify lines of action to develop alternatives around the problems diagnosed were carried out.

processes of and from subordinate agents (Del Hoyo, 2019).² While focused on very different themes, these research projects serve as inputs to reflect on the analytical use of intersectionality and, more specifically, on the potential that this framework has to shake up the exclusions on which some approaches to privilege and oppression are founded and reproduced. In short, what we present here are two ways of mobilizing intersectional tools, through which we offer ideas for those who, from a commitment to social justice, aspire to design, implement, and produce knowledge from analytical tools that facilitate the promotion of more inclusive processes of democratic deepening.

We are aware that this project has been carried out in a context of “cognitive capitalism” (Montenegro et al., 2015) and of the “commodification of knowledge” (Expósito, 2007; Virno, 2003). Critical research in this context brings us uncomfortably close to political and academic tendencies to trivialize intersectionality, turning it into a in a “sweetened and sterilized” version of feminist “best practice” (Bilge, 2016: 85). Faced with the popularization of intersectionality as a “fast-traveling theory” (Knapp, 2005) or a “catch-all” notion (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013), the approach to intersectional *praxis* that we describe in this chapter tries to avoid stopping the mere *description* of crossroads. It confronts an inertia toward hypervisualization of abstract discourses around power, which can deactivate the transformative political potential of intersectionality (Collins, 2017: 20). The institutionalized forms that demand for democratic deepening have adopted can be evaluated using similar parameters. The practical application of participatory models has emerged “from very different fronts” (Ahedo & Ibarra, 2007: 37) and has found its expression in the emancipatory discourses and transformative practices produced in Latin America. In this context, critics identify a dynamic of co-option by the Global North, which turns citizen participation into a neoliberal product at the service of privilege (Martínez-Palacios, 2021). Therefore, when authors such as Collins and Bilge (2016) refocus on the dimension of social justice when working on the heuristic of intersectionality and its relationship with democratic deepening, this is to recover its radical character, respecting its genealogy and resisting attempts to place their contributions “at the service of neoliberal agendas” (Collins & Bilge, 2016:

²Research as part of a doctoral thesis project carried out between 2017 and 2021. The project, whose provisional title is *The Political Value of Stigma*, aims to contribute to a reconceptualization of social stigmatization. This includes the development of a theoretical-analytical framework that deploys an intersectional feminist gaze. This is underpinned by a toolbox drawn from the work of Michel Foucault and aims to unravel the complex architecture of the social stigma attached to prostitution in the Spanish State. As a first step, we have drafted a historical analysis informed by a genealogical approach and based on historical and archival sources. This has made it possible to trace the (dis)continuities that have accompanied the various configurations of stigma in the Spanish State. Secondly, we carried out a detailed study of the various products and political apparatus that made up part of official public actions targeting women who practice prostitution. These products and political apparatus were produced and deployed by different levels of public administration between 1990 and 2018. To summarize, the following have been explored: laws, public policies, institutional decisions, legal practices, procedural standards, discourses promoted by institutions, the media, and cultural products.

63–87; Collins, 2017; Fassa, 2016; Bilge, 2013, 2014, Mohanty, 2013). The two research projects that we describe in this chapter share these concerns and try to exemplify, in different ways, possible means of working to mobilize intersectionality *beyond the intersection*, based on a commitment to a project of democratic deepening that does not exclude its radical, inclusive character and commitment to social justice.

The chapter is organized as follows. The first section describes an approach to intersectionality as an analytical sensibility that deploys a particular interpretive framework. Analytically, this interpretive framework is applied by means of different theoretical, methodological, and epistemological tools and approaches, which we illustrate through two research projects. We go deeper into these projects in second and third sections of the chapter. The text concludes with some ideas that emerge from these dialogues.

2 *Beyond the Intersection: Intersectionality as an Analytical Sensibility Oriented to Praxis and Social Justice*

The “coining narratives” (Collins & Bilge, 2016: 81; Collins, 2019: 123) or the *recognized* narratives of intersectionality locate its genealogy in Black Feminisms, specifically the moment in which Kimberlé Crenshaw proposes the *metaphor* of intersection (1989) to shine a light on the way in which the diversity of Afro-American women embodied a heterogeneity of experiences based on gender and race oppression. Thus, Crenshaw brought into public consciousness the complexity of African-American women’s experiences of oppression (Collins & Bilge, 2016: 65). She pointed out that the inequalities they faced could not be understood or resolved from monistic frameworks that thought subordination from a single category of social fracture (Crenshaw, 1989: 140, 1991). This initial contribution has been the subject of a wide range of uses, approaches, and reviews that have emphasized the complexity and relationality of inequalities from different approaches and theoretical sensitivities (*vid.* Bilge, 2010; May, 2015; Carasthesis, 2016; Hancock, 2016; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Collins, 2019).

In this context, American scholars Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall reflect on the institutionalized forms that intersectionality takes in academic production and lay out an approach to intersectionality as a “heuristic tool” that captures “contextual dynamics of power” (2013: 786–8). From this point of view, intersectionality represents an “analytic disposition, a way of thinking about and conducting analyses” where “what makes an analysis intersectional is not its use of the term ‘intersectionality’, (...) [but] *its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking* about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power” (*ibid.*: 795, emphasis added). We find this approach to intersectionality to be a suggestive starting point for putting into practice epistemological and methodological strategies that favor an intersectional perspective in our research. This objective implies

contextualizing intersectionality as a *praxis* that emerges from knowledges for resistance which in turn arise from the activist and intellectual trajectories of women located, depending on the context, at the intersections of classism, sexism, racism, and imperialism. It demands a recognition of the value of, gives voice to, and legitimizes those subjugated knowledges frequently invalidated and made invisible (Collins, 1998). Along the same lines as Vivian M. May, we understand that from the experiences of oppression and resistance that emanate from these intersections, intersectionality represents *not only an intersection* but also “a critique of a range of established ideas, normative political strategies, and ingrained habits of mind that have long impeded both feminist and anti-racist thought and politics” (May, 2015: viii). To this list we would add all projects committed to deepening democracy in terms of social justice. In the context of this chapter, an *intersectional way of thinking* materializes this approach to intersectionality as a critical and reflexive perspective that both permits and demands a confrontation of the unjust distortions generated by existing tools which are at the service of power. In short, we maintain that thinking not only *from* intersectionality but engaging in *an intersectional way of thinking* implies a commitment to building more just forms of knowledge.

In the search for tools to put *intersectional ways of thinking* into practice, we take as a starting point the “core constructs” and the “guiding premises” that Collins (2019) emphasizes in her approach to the intersectional interpretive framework.

Taken together, these core constructs and guiding premises “constitute building blocks” for all critical inquiry or practice informed by intersectionality (2019: 45). Relationality, power, social inequality, context, complexity, and social justice are dimensions that appear throughout investigations that deploy intersectionality, either as research topics or as methodological premises (ibid.: 44). These take on different forms and unique meanings in works that adopt an intersectional perspective. They are dimensions that refine our analyses to dismantle epistemic violence, endowing power, presence, and voice to experiences traditionally relegated to alterity and otherness. In parallel, the guiding premises of intersectionality function as axiomatic principles shared by works that deploy an intersectional perspective. Understanding intersectionality as a “roadmap for discovery” (Collins & Bilge, 2016: viii), these ideas constitute reference points followed in a journey of critical inquiry. In the context of our research, the guiding premises and core constructs take into account the “multifaceted” nature of intersectionality and its “correlated, interconnected and concurrent qualities” (May, 2015: 33). Furthermore, these dimensions are mobilized by means of different theoretical approaches, methodological strategies, and analytical tools in the two research projects that we discuss in this chapter.

In the specific case of our research, *Unveiling Oppressions* and *Stigma* approach the intersectional interpretive framework by deploying a relational approach to inequalities and social reality, on the one hand, and a perspective on power from resistance, on the other. Analytically, this is specified in the following tools and approaches:

1. The *heuristic of the intersection* or a non-additive perspective on the experience of intersectional inequalities. The “basic heuristic” (Collins & Bilge, 2016: 194) of intersectionality addresses the relationality of structures of subordination in a given context. *Matrix thinking* (May, 2015) materializes the relationality of structures of inequality and also of social problems.
2. *An approach that draws attention to the productive aspects of power*, which recognizes not only domination but also the practices of resistance that arise to confront it. The dual ontology of power (Dhamoon, 2010; Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996) is oriented to *praxis*. It is integral to the orientation toward transformation and social justice of the “intellectual traditions” (Hancock, 2016) that share an intersectional perspective.
3. *A concern about the epistemic power dynamics* that control access to and expulsion from institutionalized fields of knowledge. This includes paying attention to the questions raised through practices of resistance that emerge in this area, which give voice to silenced experiences and invisibilized conflicts.
4. *The heuristic of the domains of power* (Collins, 2000, 2017; Collins & Bilge, 2016) as a tool “to examine the organization of power relations” in operation around a specific problem in a given context (Collins, 2017: 26). The domains encompass four sites in social reality in which power operates, weaving threads of resistance. These include the domains of structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal power.
5. *Community politics* as an analytical framework to approach dynamics of resistance. For Collins, the community constitutes the epicenter of both the elaboration of knowledges and the political action of groups subordinated by an intersection of oppressions (1998, 2000). It is a central place “for understanding the political” or to understand the experience of oppression and mobilizing action (Collins, 2017: 27–8).

Below we show the particular meaning that some of these tools and approaches take on in the works *Unveiling Oppressions* and *Stigma* in more detail.

3 The Women of Zumarraga: An Intersectional Approach Shed Light on Invisibilized Conflict and Resistance

Deploying an intersectional perspective means taking on the complexity and dynamism of interwoven systems of power. These intersect to generate dynamics of oppression and resistance that mono-categorical approaches do not capture. To this end, the research *Unveiling Oppressions* by Igor Ahedo and Miriam Ureta (2019) mobilizes an intersectional interpretive framework in a diagnosis of the problems faced by the women of Zumarraga. This diagnosis keeps in sight a commitment to deepening democracy in terms of social justice. How? Its objective is to deepen democracy in terms of social justice, by providing a complex view of power that can legitimize knowledge and experiences (previously invisibilized) of oppression and

Table 1 The interpretive framework of intersectionality through its “core constructs” and “guiding premises”

Core constructs	Guiding premises
Relationality	(1) Race, class, gender, and other similar power systems are interdependent and mutually construct one another
Power	(2) Intersecting power relations produce complex, interdependent social inequalities of race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, ability, and age
Social inequality	(3) The social location of individuals and groups within intersecting power relations shapes their experiences within and perspectives on the social world
Social context	(4) Solving social problems within a given local, regional, national, or global context requires intersectional analyses
Complexity	
Social justice	

Source: Collins (2019: 44)

resistance, understanding absences to demand presences. *Unveiling Oppressions* is committed to the assumption that power is not only monopolized by privileged groups but that it is also empowering (Dhamoon, 2010: 239; Collins, 2017: 44).

Engaging in an ontology of dual power in *Revealing Oppressions* brings us closer to the third premise of the intersectional interpretive framework (cf. Table 1) and takes on a feminist epistemological perspective. Through the generation of narratives less impacted by the biases produced by sexist, racist, or classist views (Collins, 2000: 221–228), epistemic power that controls access to and expulsion from institutionalized fields of knowledge is resisted. Knowledge is democratized through the epistemic recognition of local women from the town of Zumarraga. This occurs when these women make the oppressions and resistance they experience visible, as they have a much more incisive vision of the ways in which power is imposed on them (Guzmán & Pérez, 2005: 116). Therefore, the epistemological dimension of the intersectional perspective deployed in *Unveiling Oppressions* places the experiences of those who suffer exclusion at the center (Martínez-Palacios, 2017: 44), and the knowledge generated by these “testimonial authorities” is validated (Collins, 2019: 131–142). The elaboration of knowledge is democratized by mobilizing oppositional knowledge (Collins, 1998, 2000).

From this epistemological context, the domains of structural and disciplinary power and community politics have offered possibilities in terms of being able to advance in terms of the illumination of dynamics of oppression and resistance of some women from Zumarraga. Approaching structural power as that which regulates public policies organized by institutions (Collins, 2017: 26) implies understanding public policies not only as the actions of public institutions but also as non-decision processes (Dye, 1984: 3) and their causes (Hoogwood & Gunn, 1984: 21; Walt, 1994: 41; Platero et al., 2014: 162). It is in this sense that the complexity of intersectional analysis from the structural domain of power can illuminate these possible deliberate “absences” and forms of the exercise of power. Complementing this, the idea of the structural domain of power is closely related to the capacity of different social groups to access official public decision-making spaces, as

subjectivities and practices of groups that represent difference and are subordinate can be excluded (Young, 2000: 250–251).

Therefore, intersectional analysis from the structural domain of power facilitates a democratization of knowledge in the sense that it endows epistemic power to the subjugated experiences of the women of Zumarraga. This makes it possible to shed light on the exclusions and expulsions that are reproduced in the official public spaces and to identify more precisely how the perspectives of the people most affected by social problems are “silenced” (Collins, 2017: 23). Thus, in a context of a shortage of employment and social resources, from the intersection of gender and class oppressions, complex realities emerge in which working women find themselves in a labor market that relegates them to the private sphere. They endure feminized, precarious, and poorly paid jobs, in many cases receiving cash wages under the table. This in turn excludes them from the social security system and makes them ineligible for unemployment benefits. These factors only increase the burdens placed on women who have to reconcile paid work with unpaid care work at home. This domestic labor can progressively trap women the “domestic sphere” generating “discomfort” and “suffering” produced by conflicts around work hours and the impossibility of integrating into the social life of the municipality.

If we add a further layer of complexity and interweave the power systems of gender, class, and race, the experiences faced by racialized working women are further compounded. For these women, care work is almost their only option for subsistence. This produces a paradox: taking on this type of work to earn the minimum wage, they cannot dedicate time/space to raising their own children. Some restrictions intersect with constraints inherent to being an immigrant: linguistic difficulties and difficulties due to irregular migration status and also to not having the emotional support that the presence of a family implies. This tangle of oppressions keeps these women “chained” to care work and also generates progressive exclusions and expulsions from the official public spaces. This makes it difficult for their experiences to be reflected in the design and implementation of public policies and perpetuates their exclusion from other sectors of the labor market.

Different life experiences coexist in the municipality at a complex intersection in which the power systems of gender, class, and age and mobility produce multidimensional experiences of oppression. Elderly women, for example, can be *trapped* in the private sphere, shamed by their inability to pay even the bills for basic products and services. This leads them to hide their experiences of oppression. These cases are compounded by the fact that many of these women have health or mobility problems. Those women who do not live near the center find in urban distances an added physical and symbolic barrier that separates them from public institutions. The exclusion or expulsion of all these women from official public spaces where social problems are identified has the consequence of unleashing a logic of misunderstanding and stigmatization.

Disciplinary power becomes manifest in the in groups of low-skilled unemployed women. This collective is subject to feelings of failure that materialize in a negative self-perception and low expectations for their futures. This is accompanied by processes of (self) censorship and surveillance by women of each other in a

context of competition for scarce resources—especially employment and social assistance. This competitive dynamic is amplified in the case of racialized working women. It plays a role in the configuration a discursive construction of “others,” a group subject to a greater degree of suspicion. Women in this group are accused of receiving more social assistance on the assumption that they have a greater number of children. This assumption reproduces gender stereotypes that label these women as caregivers. In this context, the control and vigilance of racialized women are especially accentuated and disciplinary power translates into prejudice. The experiences of racialized, older, and working women all feature disciplinary power as surveillance. This impedes processes of deepening democracy in terms of social justice because, once again, all those people who do not fulfill the communicative and corporal norms of conduct that are supposedly universal are excluded/expelled from political decision-making processes (Pateman, 1970: 42).

Through the fields of structural and disciplinary power, we have thrown some light on the complex experiences of oppression of women in Zumarraga. The framework of community proposed by Collins now allows us to focus on logics of resistance, endowing these women’s sub-alternized experiences with epistemic power. Practices of resistance include the following: With respect to work, many women are investing energy and time in ongoing education for adults in order to expand their options. These training processes have implications in terms of the community: spaces are created in which to share experiences, thus facilitating the development of empathy between the women participating. Whenever personal and collective empowerment processes are unleashed, they have a positive impact on the community, on occasions even overcoming entrenched distrust.

When the axes of gender and class intersect with that of race, these types of initiatives also promote language acquirement—mainly of Spanish—and familiarization with community traditions. This provides immigrant women with tools for integration. Another interesting group that emerges at the intersection of gender, class, and age is that of mothers with children in school. In this context educational centers also function as a brokerage and multicultural spaces that build community. Collins (2017) understands community as a framework for understanding political behavior. From this perspective, we have observed tendencies to weave together mechanisms of resistance based on mutual support and collective self-organization around points of conflict, which triggers processes of politicization. Thus, various women are advocating for the creation of spaces that are not segregated along the lines of origin or gender, such as a school for parents.

An intersectional framework was deployed to carry out the *Unveiling Oppressions* research. This is demonstrated in the testimonial authority of sub-alternized voices, the heuristic of the domains of power and community politics being understood as places from which to access experiences of oppression and resistances. Thus, from a complex viewpoint, this work sheds light on experiences that previously remained in the dark: where before there were “absences,” “presences” are made visible. In this sense, *Unveiling Oppressions* brings into the spotlight the emancipatory possibilities of the resistance strategies that these women mobilize. It does this from a critical epistemological position—feminist standpoint theory—which leads to a

process of knowledge elaboration that recognizes and prioritizes the lived experience of various women from Zumarraga. It is also in this sense that *Unveiling Oppressions* shows its strength with respect to the idea of democratic deepening in terms of social justice. It gives epistemic power to the women of Zumarraga intersected by systems of power, makes their sub-alternized experiences visible, grants testimonial authority to their narratives of resistance on their own terms, and recognizes their processes to advance toward social justice. It proposes a diagnosis as a starting point for deepening democracy in Zumarraga.

In a similar vein, *Stigma* shares a concern for the particular knowledge that characterizes modern forms of knowing and the relationship between these and intersectional power dynamics. Through an intersectional interpretive framework, *Stigma* problematizes these dynamics with the aim of rethinking stigma and contributing to its reconceptualization. The next section goes into detail on this point.

4 *Stigma*: An Intersectional Approach to Reveal the Architecture of Social Stigmatization

In relation to processes of democratic deepening, several authors agree that an ever-greater effort is being made by generalist theories to “get into the detail of diversity.” Platero Mendez and Martínez-Palacios capture this idea with the premise “when they enter, we all enter” (Platero & Martínez-Palacios, 2018: 212–218). Reflecting on this premise, however, raises further issues. The concept of “entry” demands that we ask ourselves, as a first step, which norms and devices constitute and make intelligible these “other” categories. Thus, the premise comes to imply a commitment to unraveling the complex forms that structure relations of domination. Thus, in this work we approach the expulsions of those abject and despised subjects whose exclusion seems to be (re)produced and is, therefore, naturalized, through “daily habits” and “nervousness and rejection” (Young, 2000: 210). We are referring here to social stigma and the subjects traversed by it.

In his now classic work, the American sociologist Erving Goffman defined stigma as “a deeply discrediting attribute” that turns its “owner” into someone “different from others (...) in someone less desirable for interaction” (2012: 13). More than half a century has passed since the publication of his work. Despite the fact that “there has been an explosive growth of research and theorizing about stigma” (Hinshaw, 2009: 25; Link & Phelan, 2001: 363), it cannot truly be said that the general ideas around stigma in sociology have notably advanced since *Goffman’s intervention* (Scambler, 2004: 29, original italics). In the context of cognitive capitalism mentioned above, stigma has been reduced to a “catch-all” notion due to a conceptualization that is “individualistic, ahistorical and politically anesthetized” (Tyler, 2018a: 746). Faced with this, there have been multiple voices that have declared the urgency of reconceptualizing stigma from critical positions. These embrace the challenge to produce knowledges that distance themselves from the

“willful ignorance” of frameworks that are adjusted to and reproduce the status quo (May, 2015: 190; *vid.* Oliver, 1990; Parker & Aggleton, 2003; Farrugia, 2009; Tyler & Slater, 2018; Tyler, 2020). In parallel to these criticisms, we are also witnessing a proliferation of political demands and social movements emerging from subjects traversed by social stigmatization. The emergence of these “voices of resistance” in public space pushes us toward the abandonment of knowledges that have naturalized and normalized stigmatic experience and practice, systematically ignoring its underlying basis (Tyler, 2014: 2). It is in this context that we have accepted the invitation to think and revindicate stigmatized subjects’ capacity for agency. Beyond this, we also recognize the analytical potential that rethinking stigma, and reconceptualizing and politicizing it from an intersectional framework, has for all those people committed to social justice.

There are many authors who understand not just Goffman’s work but the general hegemonic position of the socio-cognitive approach as factors which explain the decline in analytical use of stigma (Link & Phelan, 2001; Parker & Aggleton, 2003; Tyler, 2018a, b). In this context, we identify a need for a reading of stigma as a field of study that is not abstracted from the social and political conjunctures through which process of institutionalization of those particular knowledges that come to occupy the center takes place. In this sense, an intersectional project offers useful tools to problematize this and delve into its complexity. In the case of social stigma, if the norms that govern a given “research community” end up determining its intellectual production (Collins, 2019: 127; May, 2015), the hegemonic position of a socio-cognitive approach and the promotion of empirical experimental modes of research operate and react as elements of epistemic power. These elements, based on the legitimation of a narrow set of ways of studying and conceptualizing stigma, reproduce and sustain inequality within the framework of a discipline whose position as a cultural apparatus sometimes works at the service of power (*vid.* Ibáñez, 1990; Ovejero, 1999; Pons, 2008; Parker, 2010).

Beyond this critique of hegemonic knowledges, intersectionality also invites us to question even those works that, distancing themselves from uncritical and atomistic approaches that naturalize stigma and point to it as part of the human cognitive endowment, embrace critical perspectives. This is because epistemic power relations run through the whole of knowledge, even through critical knowledge projects (Collins, 2019: 126). We are referring here to research receptive to a recognition of the centrality of power and which, resultantly, theorizes stigma in relation to the broader process of social discrimination (*vid.* Link & Phelan, 2001). In this sense, in opposition to those “postulates that reduce political power to oppression and locate power exclusively in privileged social locations” (*ibid.*), an intersectional project sees power as productive logic and reminds us that “one is never just privileged or oppressed” (*ibid.*). In doing so, it reads stigma from a position that takes as given that “where there is power, there is also resistance” (Foucault, 2019: 88), which allows us to transcend frameworks that reduce the agency of stigmatized subjects to the defensive management of stigmatization as a private and individual experience (Siegel et al., 1998) and to explore the possibility of transgressing and resisting from *otherness* (Bhabha, 2002: 92).

However, an intersectional project warns us of another factor: the fact that the experience of stigma is not universal (Tyler & Slater, 2018). In fact, rejection, the central experience around which stigma is structured, is not distributed equally. This is because “people’s lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other” (Collins & Bilge, 2016: 2). The non-additive perspective integral to an intersectional approach is part of the heuristic of intersection that we mentioned above. It dispenses with the dominant logic of thinking about power in general, and stigma in particular, rejecting its cumulative explanations (*see* Jones et al., 1984; Crocker et al., 1998; Link & Phelan, 2001; Panchakis et al., 2018). Intersectionality, then, shows us that these “othered” and stigmatized figures are positioned in terms of class, race, gender, and sexuality. They are the *whore*, the *junkie*, the *madman*, or the *AIDS infected*, all figures produced in and from a concrete matrix of power.

In this sense, a reconceptualization of the stigma informed by an intersectional project, but one which also draws on works that allude to its long criminal genealogy (Tyler, 2018b), leads us to think of stigma as a tool of neoliberal governance that, directed toward the discipline and punishment of certain populations, is instituted as a product and vehicle of neoliberal dynamics of government (Tyler & Slater, 2018: 723). It is imperative to deactivate this apparatus in the interests of moving toward more just and democratic societies. This understanding permits a reinterpretation of stigma. As opposed to understandings which end up naturalizing stigma, we understand it as *something more* than an individual cognitive response subject to emotional and/or perceptual components that trigger complex forms of domination (Stangor & Crandall, 2000; Link & Phelan, 2001; Phelan et al., 2008). Beyond this, it responds to a historical process of consensual production of aversion based on the normative standards of behavior within the framework of a technology of power, which aims at the control and regulation of life (Foucault, 2001).

On the basis of the above, we see how an intersectional project allows us to develop alternative forms of knowledge that divert attention from those particular knowledges that (re)produce and legitimize the social order. Given this, a reading of stigma that tries to distance itself from the hegemonic individualistic gaze of the socio-cognitive approach and that mobilizes a conceptualization informed by productive and matrix thinking on power demands the implementation of useful analytical tools. Moreover, these tools must be accompanied by a clear commitment to generate socially transformative spaces and to deactivate systems of domination (Montenegro et al., 2015: 1835). It is along these lines that Collins, in the final lines of her work *Black Feminist Thought*, asks: “How does one develop a politics of empowerment without understanding how power is organized and operates?” (2000: 274). It is not enough to think about what stigma *is*, but we must pay attention to what stigma *does*, *how it does it*, and more specifically, the strategies to confront it mobilized by those whose lives are affected by it. There is therefore an urgent need to expose the complex architecture of social stigmatization with an analytical tool that breaks with perspectives anchored in passivity, victimhood, or possibilities of handling stigma as an individual and private experience. This would allow us to

“stimulate dialogues about empowerment” (Collins, 2000: 276). In short, we need tools that make it evident that the achievement of more just and democratic societies will not be possible without deactivating the stigmatic structures that traverse the experiences of stigmatized subjects.

Unveiling Oppressions applied the heuristic of the domains of power to identify the complexity with which the oppressions affecting the women of Zumarraga are structured. *Stigma* uses the same approach with the aim of tracking the processes of (re)production of stigma. In both cases this was motivated by a conviction that understanding the complexity of absences allows us to demand and structure strategies aimed at achieving presences. In this way, an intersectional reading of stigma based on the *domains* tool implies asking ourselves about those discourses, practices, and institutions through which social stigmatization is organized, managed, justified, and subjectified in a concrete spatial and temporal context. Furthermore, it is also a means to understand how strategies to confront stigma are founded transversally across all domains (Collins, 2017: 27).

Although stigma acts on bodies and is materialized as a corporealized individual response motivated by an aversive perception and/or emotion (Stangor & Crandall, 2000), an intersectional project allows us to adopt the principle, as Sara Ahmed suggests, that “emotions show us how power shapes the very surface of bodies,” so we must understand them “not as psychological dispositions, but as investments in social norms” (Ahmed, 2004: 56). In this sense, a reconceptualization of stigma, informed by an intersectional project and based on the *domains* tool, allows us to unravel how, in addition to becoming a set of practices aimed at controlling and punishing certain populations, stigma has a strategic function. This function meshes with the political rationality of a power whose functioning stigma conveys. This idea becomes more relevant as we tighten our focus on specific forms of stigmatization, such as the so-called “*whore stigma*” or the stigma attached to the practice of prostitution (Pheterson, 1993).

Taking the framework of cities in the Spanish state as an analytical example, the daily practice of stigma that emerges is of a need for distance (interpersonal dominance). A study that mobilizes the *domains* tool and that, therefore, addresses legislative products, public policies, formal and informal means for applying sanctions, discursive frameworks, and daily interactions that occur within the framework of a city facilitates a deeper analysis. It sees that stigma attached to prostitution revolves around a series of discourses and images that only serve to justify the supposed dangerousness of those racialized women who practice prostitution on public roads toward the normal order of cities (hegemonic/cultural domain). Discourses around public safety and order subsumed under the ideal of *civility* as part of neoliberal rhetoric identify those who practice prostitution in public spaces as polluting and uncivil figures, that is, figures of aversion. They are therefore read as a danger to the desirable collective standards of maintaining safety and order. This understanding can be felt, for example, not only in the various ordinances referring to public space and/or citizen safety, which are the established guarantors of a quiet, safe, accessible public space optimized for use in accordance with civic values, penalizing the exercise of prostitution (structural domain), but also in the development of a formal

administrative-police system of sanctions that, in turn, is sustained by informal mechanisms of community control within the framework of which those of us who inhabit a space emerge as guarantors of public order (disciplinary domain).

As we have stated, demanding and contributing to the inclusion of populations traversed by stigma and, subsequently, the deactivation of the relations of domination and privilege that sustain their marginalization, requires, among other things, an understanding of the complex rational which structures absences and exclusions. For this reason, we argue that a study based on structured thinking and a productive reading of power informed by an intersectional approach, has allowed us to suggest that stigma, beyond an individual “rejection reaction” derived from social categorization processes (Fiske, 1998: 357), is erected as a normative apparatus of governance by dehumanization, configured within a concrete “matrix of domination” (Collins, 2017), whose objective is to organize life at the service of the neoliberal dynamics of government (Tyler & Slater, 2018; Tyler, 2020). Intersectional tools thus allow us to add complexity to our reading of “rejection,” by showing the orchestrated and, as such, political nature of the aversion that underlies stigma. In this sense, intersectionality invites us to use complex analysis tools to approach equally complex realities. This is not a question of scholarly taste, but, fundamentally, because naming and making visible ways in which the life experiences of those who occupy the margins are structured are essential steps in deactivating the logics and inertias that reproduce domination. This is also relevant in negotiating the frameworks of projects committed to social justice and democratic deepening.

5 By Way of Conclusion: Intersectionality as a Perspective in Under Construction

The investigations with which we have dialogued in this chapter have responded to the idea that “complex questions may require equally complex strategies for investigation” (Collins, 2019: 47). The objective of this chapter has been to show that, in the context of two research projects, an intersectional interpretive framework has provided valuable input. It contributed toward understanding, from a critical point of view, two particular fields of conflict. It identified absences and blind spots traceable to the use of non-intersectional approaches. This objective allowed us to focus on absences and demand presences, facilitating the epistemic empowerment of subjugated and sub-alternized discourses and practices. This, as we have insisted, is part of the democratization of knowledge in terms of social justice. In this context, the dialogue between these works places an emphasis on intersectionality as an approach to reality that does not propose universalizing models or approaches to inequality. Rather, it is a flexible, open, and porous framework, strongly rooted in context. It mobilizes different analytical tools and approaches to shed light on the dynamics of oppression and resistances, with an orientation toward *praxis* or social transformation in contexts of deepening democracy.

We began this text by introducing some inertias that exclude democratic deepening and the need for processes and tools that link democracy, inclusion, and social justice. From this premise, we understood that emancipation and social transformation projects demand interpretive frameworks that make it possible to complicate and problematize one-dimensional and disempowering approaches to relationships of domination. The use that our two research projects make of an intersectional interpretive framework, both in terms of their commonalities and also from their points of friction, suggests, perhaps, a slippery understanding of intersectionality. However, this is also solid evidence of the creative tension between theory and praxis to which its implementation in specific contexts appeals (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Cho et al., 2013). As Collins and Bilge explain, “we think that intersectionality is best served by sustaining a creative tension that joins inquiry and praxis as distinctive, yet interdependent dimensions” (2016: 192). Thus, the projects that we have presented are simply the crystallization of a non-singular, but rather multiple, way of approaching intersectionality. This takes different forms depending on the needs, interests, and priorities demanded by the analysis of each specific problem. Collins and Bilge may have this in mind when stating that they “think that it is imperative that intersectionality remain open to the element of surprise” (2016: 203). A surprising element derived from each situated context allows, through creative tensions, an advance toward the realm of the possible, denouncing absences to demand presences and endowing sub-alternized discourses with epistemic power, in a commitment to the democratization of knowledge and social justice.

Along these lines, we understand that avoiding standardized and universalizing frameworks are mandatory steps in this project. If this is the case, it leads to questioning the existence of a properly intersectional *methodology*. We do not understand intersectionality in this way, instead choosing to emphasize that “there are ways in which intersectionality’s core premises, especially its premise of relationality, can influence methodological choices within intersectional scholarship” (Collins, 2019: 152). As we have shown throughout the text, this perspective reads intersectionality as an interpretive framework that allows us to think differently, making visible what common frameworks do not allow us to see. However, all tools must be used critically, reflexively, and responsibly. We insist that the mere *use* of intersectionality in our research is not, in itself, a panacea for deactivating the relations of domination that we reproduce in our analyses. Far from following a straight and narrow road, the investigative projects described in this chapter have shown flexibility in the forms and limits of intersectionality as applied in each case. This testifies to the artisanal and flexible nature of this interpretive framework. Ironically, we conclude by stating that intersectionality represents a radical “starting point” (Hancock, 2016:118) from which we can move forward in different projects of democratic deepening and social justice, echoing the following slogan: democratic deepening will be intersectional, or it will not be.

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Rethinking Relationships Between Public Institutions and Community Initiatives: The Cases of Astra (Gernika) and Karmela (Santutxu, Bilbao)



Izaro Gorostidi  and Zesar Martinez 

Abstract In the Basque Country, popular movement and local community initiatives have precipitated interesting changes in the relationships and the form in which dialogue is conducted between social movements, public administrations, and politicians. Based on two of these initiatives, the objective of this chapter is to analyze alternative models of relationship between public administrations and social movement networks and initiatives. The chapter also draws attention to contributions that the university and the social sciences can make in terms of both facilitating the internal strengthening of community initiatives and increasing their legitimacy with respect to public administrations and other community agents. To this end, we highlight the epistemological importance of studying and increasing the visibility of instances of political creativity. These initiatives make important social contributions including the community management of disused spaces; free training, leisure, and culture activities; places for rehearsal and experimentation; barter, recycling, and responsible consumption; and material and emotional support for marginalized people. However, they also facilitate the democratization of political institutions, expanding the horizon of what is understood as possible and achievable. After contextualizing and briefly presenting the two case studies, we conclude that a careful dialogue between popular initiatives and public administrations facilitates a strengthening of both these spaces and grassroots participatory networks of political participation. These networks contribute to the coexistence of diverse groups and identities; to social cohesion and community connectedness; to social and institutional transformation; and to the de-commodification and de-bureaucratization of spaces for the

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exercise of civil rights and for the self-managed satisfaction of social and cultural needs.

Keywords Participation · Community and public administration · University and social transfer · Political creativity

Taking democracy seriously means not just taking it
beyond the borders of liberal democracy, but
also in transforming the concept itself:
Democracy as the entire process of transforming relationships
of unequal power into relationships of shared authority – (Santos, 2010: 172).

1 Introduction

The theoretical reflection and investigative practice carried out by the Parte Hartuz [Take Part] research group (University of the Basque Country, EHU/UPV) has led us to define participation as something more than being present or even taking part or intervening in a citizen-based or institutional process. We understand participation as a process of organization and mobilization of a community of people and collective agents in which there is a conscious adoption of a role as active creators of a shared future. We could say that well before the term participation gained importance in political rhetoric, there was already a long and uninterrupted history of initiatives that burst into the public sphere from below. Their demands and initiatives responded to collective needs and have caused changes in the practices of power and in relationships between rulers and the ruled.

The type of autonomous and spontaneous participation that gives rise to movements and networks of collective action has been a central factor in experiences of very different kinds. In this article we are interested in reflecting on experiences that have given rise to changes in power relations and which have shifted the structure of the relationship between governments and public administrations and self-organized collective action networks. These citizen networks, even without institutional recognition, identify themselves as legitimate political agents with the right and capacity to intervene in the community and public spheres. In the specific context of the Basque Country, there have been important experiences of this type. The political practices developed in these cases are creating different models of relationship between community initiatives and public administrations.

As a participatory action research group, we have had the opportunity to collaborate with and therefore partake in lessons learned in the cases of Astra (Gernika) and Karmela (Santutxu, Bilbao). The objective of this work is to reflect on alternative models of relationships between public administrations and collective action networks and actions.

In the first section of this article, we present a framework for reflection on the opportunities and limits that we perceive both in the institutional sphere and in that of community initiatives, on the basis of some of the underlying rationales which

operate in each area. In a second section, we contextualize and briefly describe the experiences of Astra and Karmela, which serve as empirical points of reference to reflect on the relationship between these two areas of political intervention. We also take time to outline the tools and methodologies that the social sciences can contribute to facilitate both participatory processes and synergies between different activists and social organizations, as well as in relationships between movements and public institutions, neighborhood and commercial associations, and other social agents. In the final section, we outline our understanding of the role of public administrations in processes of participative community action, as well as the types of relationships that we understand to be most fruitful in terms of promoting creativity and political innovation. Movement in this direction would bring us closer a deeper practice of democracy, understood as an always unfinished process of popular leadership and transformation of unequal power relations.

2 Popular Movements: Opportunities and Limits in the Institutional Sphere

Here we present a general conceptualization and characterization of collective action and popular movements. These movements have been defined in very different ways. As Laraña (1999) emphasizes, the definition or theoretical delimitation of these agents has been discussed extensively, and each study highlights different aspects and dimensions. Zibechi (2007), for example, states that every popular movement seeks to question and shift social inertias by resisting general the acceptance of the relationship dynamics and social positions that the prevailing order assigns to certain social sectors. Riechmann (2001), for his part, defines movements as collective agents that intervene in social transformation and suggests that “there seems to be a consensus when it comes to pointing out that social movements involve both a strengthening of public space and a process of social revitalization” (Riechmann, 2001: 46).

The specialized literature emphasizes that popular movements question current power relations and that they carry out critical readings of reality in order to radically change asymmetries of various kinds. Martínez et al. (2012) focus on the fact that popular movements, in addition to showing a critical attitude toward the social order and its asymmetries and injustices, try to recreate life according to other logics, that is, they try to promote new models of relationships, organization, and coexistence through their political practices.

There is a broad consensus between different approaches and currents around the more open definition proposed by Diani: “Social movements are differentiated social processes consisting of mechanisms through which actors engage in collective action: (1) They engage in conflictive relationships with clearly identified opponents; (2) They are linked in dense informal networks; (3) They share a differentiated collective identity” (Della Porta & Diani, 2011: 43). Three concepts stand out in this definition: oppositional collective action, compact informal networks, and

collective identity. The authors emphasize that in the dimension of oppositional collective action, popular movements are involved in political and cultural conflicts and that they promote social change and/or directly engage a specific point of conflict. As to collective identity, the authors suggest that movements are differentiated by their ability to build networks. Specifically, as they carry out activities and actions, their networks expand and new adhesions are generated. Shared commitments promoted by movement generate a shared identity and common goal.

Informal and compact networks are another characteristic feature of these agents. As is recognized by Della Porta and Diani (2011: 44), a social movement takes place to the extent that both individual and organized actors engage in continuous exchanges of resources and the pursuit of common goals without losing their autonomy or independence.

To contextualize the two cases that we present later, we believe that it is essential to characterize, on the one hand, the behavior of social movements toward institutions and to describe the prevailing logic in the institutional sphere.

2.1 Political Behavior of Social Movements Confronting the Institutional Sphere

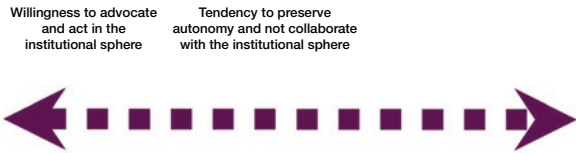
There is not a clear consensus within or across social movements as to how to engage with public administrations and the established political system. We would, therefore, like to draw attention to this area of debate. The analytical framework summarized below outlines two opposed positions present within social movements in relation to this question.

Importantly, these are not static positions. We want to make it clear that the two perspectives or trends identified here are better understood as belonging to a *continuum* with multiple intermediate positions, some tending toward one of the poles and others more to the opposite. On the one hand, one perspective prioritizes the re-appropriation of institutions. From this position, movements propose for themselves a privileged speaking position and protagonism within institutions, on this basis of which new models of institutional governance can be implemented. The proposals emerging from this position include governance networks with a leading role occupied by civil society and organized citizens.

On the other end of the spectrum, the autonomy of popular movements is underlined and vindicated. Models of participatory democracy are systematically critiqued, and collective action is emphasized as a generator of autonomous spaces built from below. The self-organization of the community and the creation of autonomous spaces by and for organized civil society are defended (Fig. 1).

The latter position places more importance on the construction of emancipatory strategies that are created autonomously, that is, on approaches and processes that create community self-organization. These insist on a need to move away from the

Fig. 1 Political behaviors of social movements confronting the institutional sphere. (Source: Authors)



liberal logic of the market and the state and are reticent about the efficacy of dialogue with established institutions. Zibechei states that from this point of view, institutional settings and structures represent serious limits to the construction of emancipatory processes. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, throughout the South American continent, a situation emerged in which progressive left forces gained access to government. The Uruguayan thinker notes that this apparent success constituted an unprecedented challenge for social movements (Zibechei, 2007: 25). He emphasizes that in some countries progressive forces' rise to power weakened social movements through the cooptation of some sectors and the isolation of others. He therefore tries to extract lessons from these experiences to avoid fragmentation of different sectors engaged in social struggle.

Thinkers on the anti-institutional end of the spectrum prioritize the construction of relationships of solidarity while maintaining the autonomy of action and thought of social movements. We are here describing networks that prioritize the establishment and maintenance of spaces outside general social organization that seek to build their own spaces for consumption, leisure, ideology, and, in the end, life (Ibarra et al., 2002: 252).

On the other hand, the voices that position themselves in favor of collaboration with the institutional sphere consider this collaborative advocacy and transformation work legitimate and necessary. They are in favor of shared governance, aligning themselves in favor of *policy making* (Ibarra et al., 2002). Therefore, they participate in the established spaces of deliberation as part of an attempted transformation of institutional logic. They consider participatory processes to be means of expanding the reach and agency of social agents.

From both perspectives, both inside and outside the institutional sphere, the democratizing function of popular movements stands out. In other words, special emphasis is placed on the work carried out by movements as a tool to regenerate institutional logic.

In any case, beyond painting these different views regarding public administration as a dichotomy, we want to hold onto the idea of the *continuum*. That is to say, although we have polarized two opposing positions for explanatory purposes, we understand that in each context and experience, there are multiple intermediate and nuanced positions that, fortunately, complicate and enrich this false dichotomy.

2.2 *Characteristics of the Institutional Sphere*

According to García Linera (2016: 12), the state consists of an institutional network distinguished by three characteristics: (1) The state is the political correlation of forces between social classes and blocks; (2) the state is a machinery through which decisions, regulations, bureaucracies, and hierarchies are materialized; and (3) the state is a collective idea, part of the common sense of the current era, which guarantees moral consent between the rulers and the ruled.

Santos (2005), Ibarra (2011), and García Linera (2016) stress the need to rethink the state and highlight the contributions that popular movements can make in this area. They develop different proposals for the reinvention of the state that aspire to the transformation of organizational structures, resource management, and decision-making. Among the difficulties in achieving this, they highlight the increasingly limited sovereignty of states and their institutions. The power of parliaments and governments vis-à-vis international markets and institutions has been steadily declining.

These authors also draw attention to deficiencies in the institutional sphere that are the result of bureaucratization and the internal logic of the administration. A tendency toward bureaucratization and departmentalization, as well as the elitism of the administration, makes the political and administrative regeneration of institutions very difficult. Starting in the 1970s, the crisis of the Weberian model opened the doors to new public management, which is deeply influenced by neoliberalism. The logic of the market was applied, therefore, in bureaucratic models. The weakness of the state is not a secondary or unintended effect of the globalization of the economy according to Santos (2005: 315) but the result of a political process that tries to confer to the state another type of force, a force more subtly adjusted to the political demands of global capitalism. In this context, Santos identifies a need for cooperation between the state and civil society to combat neoliberal logic. For this reason, he underlines that a reform of the state is necessary in close collaboration with collective action networks.

We want to emphasize, however, that there is a constitutive tension between (1) social movements as sudden and intense political forces and practices that seek to shift established norms beyond their internal limits and, therefore, take on a transgressive dynamic (they are creative forces with non-conventional repertoires of proposal and action) and (2) political forces and practices framed in regulating sets of rules and legal, procedural, and administrative requirements, within the established institutional framework.

Social movements can be understood as a democratic overflow “from below” (popular sectors marginalized by different social conditions) over established institutions. This defines from the outset a conflictive tension between social movements and political-state representation, affecting both parties.

To this the emancipatory transformations must be added that many social movements aspire today, anti-capitalist, pro-sovereignty, feminist, environmentalist, food sovereignty, and others. These are not only a matter of decrees, laws, or public

policies but also of transformations of the everyday social relations and of the dominant models of life. For social movements, the focal points of conflict are distributed across multiple life spaces and not limited to the direct contestation of governmental power. Their perspective on power and emancipatory transformation is not restricted to advocacy – much less the *seizure of power* – in an institutional political context. There is a self-distancing from the vision of power and social transformation associated with leftist political parties.

Social movements, depending on the correlation of forces and the development of a political conflict, can reach the point of decentering the structures of institutionalized political system. In fact, processes of democratization or democratic intensification are processes of intense political dispute in which the hegemonic sectors are forced to open up and discuss previously unquestionable issues, with previously excluded political subjects.

There are many experiences in which social movements have become part of the machinery of the system, and this has led them to take on multiple and different challenges, as determined by context. However, we could say that there is a common trend. Movements can influence spaces of institutional political participation directly and indirectly. They can negotiate the scope, meanings, and contents of public policies, for example. However, this is always within a framework given by established institutions, which in most cases does not encompass the most fundamental demands and objective of the movements. Undoubtedly, these processes expand the democratic framework, disrupting the relations of power and hegemony. However, they are also political processes in which dominant sectors, in order to maintain their authority, try to recalibrate mechanisms of control by integrating emerging political subjects into existing institutions. These mitigate the potential of movements to subvert the power relations and hegemonies that maintain institutional hierarchies as a whole.

Moments in which a restructuring of power accompanies a co-option of social movements can be understood as a political danger. However, if a rigid anti-institutional stance is maintained, a movement faces the dangers of isolation, invisibility, and political insignificance. In other words, some cases are characterized by a rejection of institutions and their political agents on principle. This position might be adopted in order not to fall into political rationales foreign to those of the movement itself or to avoid becoming “contaminated.” The dangers here can be associated with self-isolation and difficulties in terms of generating visible and sustained transformation. Similarly, a movement’s ability to connect with society as a whole can be diminished, and this may lead to difficulties mobilizing a politically significant segment of the population. A rejection of institutions can make movements victims of their own political marginality and increase their exposure and vulnerability to institutional control and repression. A movement can become restricted to closed groups, almost cliques, with little political impact. This lack of impact does not, however, delegitimize the dignity of an ongoing creative drive toward emancipatory transformation.

Above we described some of the elements that can help us understand the often difficult and tense relationship between social movements and institutions, as well

as the rejection, distance, or mistrust that movements sometimes maintain with respect to institutions and institutional political agents. The degree of distance maintained between movements and institutions is subject to frequent shifts and reassessment in response to particular contexts and conflicts. Popular mobilization itself produces changes in the correlation of forces and legitimacy of movements vis-à-vis institutions.

We understand that their ability to establish autonomous relationships with institutions is an element that helps to enhance the emancipatory character of social movements. This can be achieved without falling into cooptation on the one hand or isolation or self-exclusion on the other. Self-exclusion can weaken a movement's capacity for political influence within institutions as a disputed terrain and in society as a whole. In the following section, we describe the two case studies on which our analysis is based.

3 Spaces for Collaboration Between Collective Action Networks and Public Administrations

Two collaborations between community initiatives and the university research team Parte Hartuz (UPV/EHU) are presented below. These collaborations represent the key points of reference for the learning and reflection detailed in this paper. The research group participated in two areas. On the one hand, this included the accompaniment of participatory processes of coordination and reflection between different organizations and social activists. Specifically, this meant supporting the preparation of methodologies for and participation in the dynamization of assemblies, meetings, and work sessions. On the other hand, it included conducting specific studies to improve outreach and participation in community spaces. Finally, it has included the facilitation of conversations and negotiations with public administrations and other social, political, and commercial organizations in the region (neighborhood organizations).

As detailed below, collaboration with university has had a dual role. On the one hand, it was related to the strengthening of processes of coordination, reflection, and joint work between different activists and social organizations. On the other hand, it was linked to support and legitimation in relations with public administrations and other organized sectors of society.

3.1 Context: The Case of Astra

Astra was an initiative led by groups and associations in the municipality of Gernika (17,016 inhabitants, 2019) to reclaim an old arms factory closed in 1998 and to create a space open to the public and their social and cultural initiatives. At the end of 2005 and during 2006, after several occupations, evictions, and mobilizations,

different participatory processes were initiated by the social groups that had occupied the building. A team from the University of the Basque Country provided support for the facilitation of these processes. In 2012, the Astra factory was successfully converted to a public community space self-managed by the Astra Coordinating Assembly. The project is currently operational and connects a number of different collectives and individuals.

The driving force behind the entire experience was the Coordinating Assembly, which called for different levels of support and collaboration from the University and public administrations. Astra represents a sociopolitical experience that combines different elements of interest. The initiative was launched by activist collectives, which convened and facilitated participatory processes open to citizens and the entire network of citizen associations. These processes coordinated and strengthened broad and diverse social networks. This in turn made it possible to establish a dialogue with public administrations in which the popular initiative enjoyed sufficient legitimacy to be respected and supported.

Public institutions have allowed the popular initiative to continue in peace and to act autonomously, although this relationship has not been without difficulties and tensions. They have also supported the project financially, funding the rehabilitation and maintenance of the building. Both the Gernika local council and the Basque Government (both institutions presided over by governments from different political tendencies over the period under discussion, 2005–2020) have accepted the foresight shown by the popular initiative, both in terms of their capacity for action (occupation of the building, social mobilization) and their capacity to draw up proposals and projects, at a time when government institutions had not developed any concrete project for the space. Astra activists underline some key dynamics when analyzing the trajectory of the project and the lessons learned. These include their ability to anticipate the reaction of institutions when squatting an abandoned building and converting it for sociocultural use. They also refer to their ability to define a project for that building in a way that was open to the wider social fabric and people of Gernika. This is linked to a capacity to mobilize people, through demonstrations, press conferences, and statements of support from recognized public figures in the spheres of culture and human rights. Linked to the above, participatory processes were developed as part of a methodology for political work from and for the community. This made it possible to develop these projects through open and heterogeneous processes and empowering and cohesive forms of work. Further, these processes were also endorsed and legitimized by a facilitation group linked to the local university.

Two key factors emerged. The first encompassed the abovementioned progressive strengthening and legitimation of the initiative through social mobilization and the successful identification of support legitimizing the initiative. This involved attracting both direct participation and statements of support, as well as resources and alliances to carry out the facilitation of participatory processes. Secondly, the centrality of these participatory processes themselves was critical in the popular and collective construction of proposals and projects. These two factors were determinant in ensuring that public administration took the popular initiatives seriously,

allowing them to continue self-organizing and, finally, providing financial support. This support was given without strings, respecting the autonomous and self-managed nature of the initiative, without imposing ideological or normative (bureaucratic) considerations that would distort the autonomous and popular character of the project.

As to the tools and resources deployed by the university team, collaboration between the Astra Coordinating Assembly and University of the Basque Country working group consisted above all in the accompaniment and facilitation of emergent participatory processes. This participation began at the request of the Coordinating Assembly. It was aware of the University Working Group's experience in the dynamization of community processes and participatory action research in different towns and cities in the Basque Country. Due to the large number and diverse cross section of groups and people with different perspectives and ways of working who wanted to participate in participatory processes being developed as part of the Astra project, the Coordinating Assembly reached out to the university team for support in this area.

3.2 Context: The Case of Karmela

Karmela is a community project rooted in the Bilbao neighborhood of Santutxu (pop. 34,083, 2019). In November 2015, different groups decided to reactivate the Ikastola Karmelo, an old disused educational center. Karmela defines itself as a community project for the common good that, overcoming the public-private dichotomy, is committed to collective ownership and community management of public spaces. Its aim is to address the sociocultural needs of the residents of Santutxu and Bilbao.

The objectives and activities of this project were agreed on through a series of different process of reflection carried out by activists from different organizations and groups. As an outcome of this process, different activities and initiatives are currently being carried out in this self-managed space. These include a library and study spaces; free Basque language (Euskara) classes; a gym and climbing wall for sports activities; cultural and political conferences and events; and recreational gatherings (popular meals at neighborhood celebrations, children's birthdays). There is also temporary accommodation for migrants in transit.

The facilities already present in the old school building (patio, traditional Basque ball court, classrooms, dining room, kitchen, cinema) have become public meeting spaces for coexistence between diverse equals, creating relationships and bonds. There is a multiplicity of initiatives and social demands. In short, it is a community project that reinforces the social fabric and offers spaces for intergenerational and intercultural encounters and free cultural activities for the poor. Therefore, it is a general social good which increases community cohesion and strengthens mutual support networks to confront discrimination and exclusions derived from economic, cultural, and gender inequalities.

Karmela's organizing assembly defines the pillars and challenges that characterize this project as follows:

1. Diversity and openness. Within the Karmela project, neighbors of different ages, sex and origins, cultures, languages, and interests come together. Therefore, coexistence based on mutual knowledge and respect is key. Acting locally and thinking globally, Karmela seeks to become an example of a project enjoying wide participation for Bilbao and Basque Country, without losing its specific local connection with the suburb of Santutxu.
2. Construction of transformative alternatives. Karmela has emerged to offer an alternative which meets the real needs of its neighbors. In Karmela, popular models are encouraged to build and manage the commons, over and above the dominant mercantilist model and logic, and to organize and empower different initiatives. The project shows that it is possible to build something needed for the good of the majority and has proven that it is feasible to build projects through communal work. Fundamental to the Karmela project are libertarian values, because not only the acts and ambitions materialized through the project but also the means of achieving these are transformative. In Karmela, collective interest prevails over private interests. The capital of the project is the dedication and work of neighbors and citizens and also the collective benefit produced as a result of the relationships and collaboration between individuals and groups.
3. By and for the people. This project encourages neighborhood participation, but not only in the initiatives or activities it organizes. In Karmela, neighbors are active, creating subjects, and, therefore, citizens are not understood as mere spectators or consumers. Karmela is rebuilt every day through the abilities and desires of each participant. It is also a space for popular projects that individual creators wish to carry out and to generate synergies between these people and projects. People need to form networks, and, thus, Karmela is conceived of as a space for mutual enrichment in different skills and values. More than a physical space, it is a project that facilitates the identification and formation of networks between agents and has the ability to generate comfortable areas to work. In addition, it maintains close ties and collaborates with various groups that work in favor of social transformation in other areas.

3.3 Contributions from the University

This paper has so far presented the two case studies that serve as points of reference for rethinking the relationship between public administrations and collective action networks and the role that university working groups can play in the negotiation of that relationship. It now goes into detail with respect to the specific contributions made by the university team for each case. Collaboration with the popular and community initiatives has involved four types of task or contribution:

1. The facilitation of meetings and assemblies through dynamics and participatory methodologies derived from theory and experiences with popular education and the facilitation of organizational processes. The university team has been able to contribute very useful tools and frameworks for facilitating and coordinating the work of large and heterogeneous assemblies in which there is a marked diversity of age, political trajectory, ideology, and work culture. These methodologies and ways of working seek to guarantee equal participation and a collective development of analysis, strategies, and initiatives, based on the different needs felt on a daily basis by the people participating in an assembly. They take special care to maintain an environment of respect, acceptance, and trust, in which all participants feel comfortable because (1) They have the same opportunities to speak and make contributions; (2) listening is mutual, respectful, and equal; and (3) it is felt that all contributions (each in its own style and mode of expression) are equally important and equally considered in agreements and decision-making processes. This leads to a feeling of acceptance and legitimacy in the space which in turn creates the trust, ownership, and level of agreement demanded by collective work and cooperation.
2. The documentation and systematization of popular knowledge: the documentation of debates and resolutions adopted in minutes, audio recordings, and other media. Through these means, the ideas and proposals generated in different meetings and assemblies are organized into documents and workflow diagrams, making it possible to provide continuity to processes in a sustained and ongoing manner. This includes the identification of tensions and disagreements and the formulation of proposals to address these disagreements considering their rational (needs, interests, expectations, etc.) and emotional (illusions, doubts, fears, etc.) dimensions, so that the process of reflection and community organization does not become blocked.
3. The execution of specific studies to improve the scope and dissemination of initiatives: surveys, discussion groups, and participatory workshops are used to analyze different perceptions generated by a community initiative among populations at furthest from those within social networks affiliated with the project. Other works are aimed at awareness raising and communication of the open nature of the community space. Its objective is to avoid endogamous inertias and increase the likelihood of activating different social sectors and promoting their agency in social, cultural, and political activities.
4. The facilitation of meetings and negotiations with state institutions and neighborhood committees. Relationships with government institutions and other local officials, including building administrators and representatives of neighborhood committees, can be difficult and tense. This can sometimes be traced back to the lack of institutional recognition of social movement projects, the ever-present temptation to use repression, and the difficulty with which spontaneous eruptions of popular agency can be made to fit within existing legal frameworks. At other times, tensions can be linked to the inconvenience that the organization of activities and events that bring together a large number of people can generate in everyday life. Ideological discrepancies, conflicting interests, and a lack of

understanding also make up part of the picture. All of these factors come into play when defining a framework for acceptance and coexistence. Our experience shows that university support for popular initiatives strengthens their legitimacy and increases their recognition by other agents, which establishes more symmetrical and favorable conditions for dialogue, listening, and understanding. In addition, a well-thought-out proposal for a dialogue and a careful methodology for organizing and moderating these conversations facilitates the search for negotiated agreements and a shared definition of responsibilities.

The university is an agent that can play a relevant role in strengthening collective action networks and their initiatives. This is shown through these types of tasks and activities which are carried out in collaboration with activists and social groups that lead community initiatives. Through this collaboration, the university fulfills its purpose of providing a public service and acts with social responsibility. This is also confirmed in the recognition received by the social movements which have collaborated with the university team in dialogue with the public administration. We fully understand that these collaborative and supportive relationships are two-way. The activism of the people who participate in different collectives and initiatives is also a source of knowledge. This allows us to exchange, learn, and integrate theoretical reflection with praxis. It enriches our teaching and research work with experiences that keep us in touch with the contradictions and difficulties which are part of real-world practices of intervention in and construction of the social and political.

These are times in which research is enmeshed in a competition for “excellence,” and institutional evaluation agencies grant recognition for research work based on publications in “high impact” global journals, with rankings controlled by a few multinationals. Thus, the expansion of market liberalism in the academic sphere has promoted fierce competition between individuals that feeds into dynamics of curriculum stuffing, self-citation, and narcissism. This hinders and marginalizes work carried out through collective and not individual efforts, oriented toward cooperation with agents with few resources, and whose impact and value are felt at a local level. When it falls into these dynamics, the university loses touch with its obligations as a public service. The imperative to disseminate critical thinking, analytical resources, and operational tools for a more cohesive and just society is pushed to the margins. We understand that public universities, as non-profit institutions financed with public resources, hold an obligation to serve the general interest. This can be contrasted with both individual career ambitions and those of collaborating private entities motivated by the for-profit logic of the market. Priority should, therefore, be given to collaboration with processes and agents motivated by general social interests that seek to improve the living conditions of the population as a whole. These very agents often experience worst living conditions because they have fewer resources and opportunities and less power to advocate for their interests.

Although there is a lack of academic and institutional recognition of the type of social transfer we have described in this work, this is more than compensated for by the gratitude and recognition received from the organizations, social activists, and political leaders with whom we collaborate and learn together. Indeed, this type of contribution from the university to its immediate social context gives a degree of

satisfaction beyond that of simply doing one's job. It also gives back both in terms of knowledge and teaching. Knowledge emerges from working grounded in the muddy complexity of real sociopolitical processes. Teaching is enhanced since classroom practices are nourished by what has been learned through working in these processes, with all their ambiguities.

Finally, we return to the central axis of this section and the role that the university can play in the coordination and collaboration between collective action networks and public administration. The two experiences that we have presented in this article have facilitated learning that can be summarized as follows. First, the prioritization of dialogue and collaboration between popular initiatives, the university, and public administrations had permitted the construction of spaces and community dynamics capable of responding to general social interests, that is, the combined work of these different agents has facilitated the strengthening of community dynamics of mutual support, exchange, interdependence, and noncompetitive, collaborative work.

Thus, from this prioritization of collaboration between the public sector and the community, it is possible to de-commodify and de-bureaucratize processes of responding to social needs, strengthening nonprofit, noncompetitive, and excessively normative work spaces. With all its successes, mistakes, difficulties, and contradictions, this process is fundamentally about open access to spaces by all social sectors. This means removing administrative and material limitations on participation that generate exclusions or elitisms.

Furthermore, in a context in which social inequalities and violence derived from sexism, classism, and racism are increasing, it is important to value community spaces as strategic spaces for the exercise of civil and political rights of organization and participation. Spaces such as those presented in the case studies above promote coexistence, bring together diverse groups and identities, facilitate relationships, and thus favor integration and social cohesion.

4 The Role of Public Administrations

Over the last 30 years, local politics have evolved in a way which has been marked by citizens' obtainment of greater political centrality (Ajangiz & Blas, 2008; Subirats & Parés, 2014). We share the view that citizens have been gaining sociopolitical prominence at the local level since the 1980s. There has been an evolution from traditional forms of representative government, leading to new forms of participatory governance that confront the crisis of the representative system. This transformation has led to some innovative community management practices of public spaces.

Along these lines, in the Basque Country, there have been some cases in which alternative models of public community relationships have emerged. These have generated alternatives to the public-private model that still prevails. The cases of Astra in Gernika and Karmela in Bilbao are two examples of this.

We refer here to emerging practices, closely linked to the concept of social democratization, which is aligned with the principles of participation and self-organization to meet social needs through autonomous organization. These processes erupt from the bottom up. Civil society agents who share objectives and demands come together to respond to shared problems. They carry out and promote democratizing practices that empower and help transform power relations that exist between the rulers and the ruled.

What is new in these cases is the role that public administrations can and are playing. In 2017, the Barcelona Provincial Council, in Catalonia, published a report containing interesting statements based on a process of reflection that the organization carried out with respect to the role of public administrations in participatory processes. This publication highlights five major challenges for institutions in the area of citizen participation in local politics. They can be summarized as follows (Diputació Barcelona, 2017: 22):

1. There is a need to redefine the concept of citizen participation so as to also consider processes that are created outside public administrations. There is a need to activate, facilitate, and collaborate in these processes involving administrations together with the community.
2. The challenge is to adopt new practices of policy co-production and ensure collaboration between public administrations and civil society.
3. There is a need to incorporate new information and communication technologies and to use these new technologies to guarantee transparency and to create new spaces for the production of public policies.
4. There is also a need to reformulate the current institutional architectures of participation, creating new, more flexible, and less bureaucratic formats.
5. Finally, there is a need to face the challenge of internally reorganizing local administrations. To this end management processes should be adapted to ensure that participatory activities are developed in a coordinated manner.

This type of reflection has also been carried out in the Basque Country, albeit on a smaller scale. We can cite the Bherria program, carried out by the Department of Employment and Social Policies of the Basque Government together with the Basque Council for Volunteering. The Bherria program was rolled out in September 2017 and aims to explore and promote new forms of public-social relationship. As a first challenge, it sought to address the community management of public spaces. The basic conclusions of this program have been summarized in ten key points for public-social collaboration and the promotion of active citizenship and volunteering by public administrations. As to the role of the public administrations, we would highlight the following point (Aprendizajes Bherria, 2017: 11):

From public administrations we are reaching out to citizens through participatory processes. We are learning and improving the means by which we do this, but we need to work at a structural level to facilitate a logic of participation. This means going beyond specific processes and making participation part of our operational logic. It means getting outside our comfort zones, activating conversations, sharing power and taking some risks.

In order for the logic of participation to become the operating logic of public administrations, it is necessary, in addition to what has already been commented, to make resources available to citizens and their networks so that they can contribute to the common good (Adams & Hess, 2008: 3–4). For this reason, it is necessary to approach public administration not from its management aspect but from the perspective of the social and political function that it fulfills. Guaranteeing and developing the rights and freedoms of citizens should be its mission and by these means fulfilling its role in strengthening democracy. The OCD itself identifies a necessity for the public sector “to redefine its relationship with society; build a new legitimacy and a new narrative of the public as plural and integrated; to acquire new knowledge, skills and resources to face new social needs and demands (...)” (2018, p. 18, Cited in Arenilla & Delgado, 2019, p. 37).

In short, we are talking about processes of centering citizens and their ability to make decisions around public and shared spaces. This is part of recovering the relationship between life and politics (Federici, 2010). We are talking about putting processes of democratic deepening into practice through shared management practices developed in an open, shared, and participatory manner. To this end, as Innerarity points out, it is necessary to establish inclusive administrations. This inclusiveness “can be considered the most appropriate concept of democratic administration insofar as administration is understood as an open system that incorporates into its logic the influence that civil society can exert on it” (2020: 186).

5 Conclusions

Through our experiences with the Karmela and Astra projects, we have identified some key points around the role of public administrations in these types of process. We summarize these below.

On the one hand, public administrations demonstrate a lack of recognition of the social agents who participate in collective action networks that lead disruptive and emergent participative processes. For this reason, we believe that it is of vital importance first to recognize the legitimate role of these social agents and, secondly, to prioritize dialogue and work in common with them.

We believe that participation is increasingly being redefined through these emergent, disruptive processes, and that is why acceptance and facilitation of, and collaboration with, these processes is necessary on the part of public administrations.

In the two cases analyzed, work was done so that administrations came to realize that they had to grant prominence and centrality to the collective action networks that took part in this type of process and accept them as priority collaborators. The fifth annex of the agreement, which transferred the management of the old El Karmelo school from Bilbao City Council to the popular coordinating committee of the Karmela Project, states:

The relationship between the City Council and the Karmela project will be based on respect and, therefore, the project itself, its modes of organization, needs and rhythms, with words and deeds, will be respected. In this sense, paternalistic and authoritarian attitudes will be avoided when confronting problems that may arise. The relationship between the City Council and Karmela will be governed by the organizational form of this popular initiative.

A second key point would be to allow these projects to develop as decided by the participants in these collective processes, without interference. In the case of these projects, the administration's job is to accommodate and protect, both legally and financially. Through these experiences we have verified that when the social agents so request, as has been the case with Astra, administrations should support these processes with financial resources. They must also accept that, while maintaining transparency and openness to the public as a whole, the managers of these community spaces are the agents of these networks of collective and community action. The management of both Astra and Karmela is under the direct control of the people who are part of these projects and not local government administrations. The role of these institutions is to facilitate and not obstruct. In the case of Karmela, the first annex of the assignment of use agreement ceding the use of the building to the organizing collective states (2020):

The Karmela project is a community project that is rooted in the neighborhood and identifies itself as a common good. The objectives and actions of this project have been agreed upon through different dynamics and participatory reflections that have been carried out between citizens and neighbors since 2015, and constitute the construction of innovative alternative projects that identify and satisfy the basic needs of the community.

A further conclusion to which this paper arrives is to emphasize that public administrations can facilitate and take charge of bureaucratic procedures. In the cases of Astra and Karmela, the work carried out by public administrations to simplify bureaucratic codes and thus facilitate the understanding of this operating logic has been important. It has also been necessary to find a balance between formal rigidity and informal laxity, in favor of the viability of projects. Innerarity (2020: 191) states that the complexity and inflexibility of administrative bureaucratic procedures enforces a principle of generality and does not admit arbitrary decisions. However, this can also imply possible weaknesses, especially in terms of an inability to learn or carry out much needed transformations.

That public administrations took charge of bureaucratic procedures has been very positive in the two cases we have been involved with, especially when it came to formalizing agreements and the administrative transfer of use and cession of the spaces.

The way in which administrations have conceded prominence and power in order to enable community management of public spaces has also been key. It is true that from a neoliberal point of view, there is a certain temptation to let the community manage its own spaces simply in order to reduce public expenditure and cease to offer this public service. However, in the two cases under discussion, it does not appear that this factor significantly influenced local government. In both cases the impetus to autonomous management clearly emerged from the social movement

networks themselves. Especially in early phases, local governments resisted and placed obstacles in the path of this management model. The efforts and commitment of popular and community initiatives made autonomous management possible. This demanded ongoing struggle to defend the direct agency of citizens and widen democratic participation in the public sector. This is clearly identifiable in the fourth point of the agreement between the municipality of Gernika and the Astra Coordinating Assembly.

Astra is a space that encourages the direct participation of people in the management of public heritage. (...) This includes artistic production, social initiatives, critical thinking and the dissemination of ideas and actions that seek the democratization of the public sphere.

Finally, we want to emphasize that in order to rethink citizen participation in an innovative way, it is necessary to create a new culture in public administrations, at both technical and political levels. As stated by Subirats and Parés (2014: 11), these experiences of political participation from below create initiatives and alternative solutions that government administrations do not permit. They decide and act outside the official decision-making structures. The self-management of empty spaces, community gardens, consumer cooperatives, and other collaborative experiments of this type exemplify this pro-active dimension of citizenship in search of solutions to social problems and needs. This work can be supported by institutions and public administrations as long as they are able to see themselves as living systems, predisposed to improvement, learning, and collaboration. They must show openness to community initiatives that broaden the diversity of approaches and responses to social needs.

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