

Reclaiming Participatory Governance

Social Movements and the Reinvention of Democratic Innovation

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Chapter 11

Democracy-Driven Governance and Governance-Driven Democratisation in Barcelona and Nantes

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11 Democracy-Driven Governance and Governance-Driven Democratisation in Barcelona and Nantes

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Introduction

The growing popularity and worldwide diffusion of forms of participatory governance over recent decades highlight an important paradox: “democratic innovations” (Smith 2009) promise to open up new opportunities for citizen participation at a time when the space for political choice and democracy has been constrained by neoliberal technocracy (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2016). This raises fundamental questions on the space for projects to “deepen democracy” (Fung and Wright 2003) within contemporary capitalist political economy. In this chapter we examine the relationship between participatory governance and these broader processes, with a view to assessing opportunities for emancipatory and democratic transformations. We do so by comparing two approaches to participatory governance: the first one is what Warren (2014) termed “governance-driven democratization” (GDD); the second one is an alternative form which in other work (Bua and Bussu 2021; Bua and Bussu, introduction to this volume) we have labelled “democracy-driven governance” (DDG).

Warren’s work offers the best description of the dominant form of participatory governance: an elite-led form where the aim is to address the legitimacy crisis of institutions and experts and to improve policymaking on complex issues, by involving new voices and interests. The rationale is therefore functionalist in nature and the agenda is often shaped by agencies “inviting” citizen participation (Cornwall 2004). DDG is more critically oriented and bottom-up. It emerges through popular mobilisation, attempts to bring social movements into the state and has transformative aspirations (Bua and Bussu 2021; Sintomer 2018). The key difference is that whereas GDD accepts the basic parameters of neoliberal political economy and is therefore easily incorporated into good governance discourses, DDG has more radical ambitions; it challenges the separation of politics and economics that characterises liberal democracy, and it is driven by a social justice orientation.

The chapter develops an analytical framework derived from previous work explaining the institutionalisation of participatory governance (Bussu 2012; Fung and Wright 2003; Heller 2001). Our aim is to use this framework to develop knowledge as to the conditions under which DDG-like forms of participatory

governance develop, flourish and are sustained or undermined. To this end, we draw on a comparison of Nantes and Barcelona, two cities with similar governance histories and contextual features, but with variations on the recent development of DDG in Barcelona and the sustenance of GDD in Nantes. This chapter explains this divergence, seeking to identify conditions that support DDG. The next section presents our analytical framework, which we then use to examine key features of both cases. Finally, we draw out comparative lessons on the conditions for the development of DDG.

Analytical Framework

Different forms of participatory governance can be placed on a spectrum between those seeking to revitalise and improve the internal efficacy and legitimacy of existing democratic systems (GDD) and those seeking to expand the scope of democratic regulation and challenge the way existing institutions function (DDG). Different approaches to participatory governance can be compared using this continuum. However, it is important to emphasise different forms of citizen participation exist in a dynamic relationship and interact with each other. Both GDD and DDG spaces can generate “new fields of power” (Barnes et al. 2007: 54), where what Blaug (2002) refers to as “critical” and “incumbent” concerns interact. Despite being elite-led, citizens invited to participate in GDD-like spaces often “transgress positions as passive recipients and assert their rights” (Cornwall and Coelho 2007, see also Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2016), and DDG spaces originally “claimed” through social mobilisation can become functional to incumbency through assimilation and co-optation (Cornwall 2004; Gaventa 2004).

What drives this dynamism? In this section we draw on previous work (Bua and Bussu, 2021; Bussu 2012) to outline a framework combining agential variables (political leadership and civil society) and institutional variables (local autonomy and socio-economic context) which can act as a constraint or trigger for change. We theorise how these variables interact to produce conditions (un)favourable to the development of DDG-like governance processes and apply them to explain different participatory governance trajectories.

Political Leadership

Local leadership plays a crucial role in facilitating or hindering social mobilisation and social innovation (Pares et al. 2017). Political elites might have an interest in opening an inclusive process, in order to alter the balance of power with opponents to increase their visibility and widen their support base. Local leaders might be stronger or weaker, enjoy more or less personal support, and have a greater or lower incentive to increase their legitimacy through participation. Leadership eager to build support might foster alliances with excluded or weaker social actors against political opponents (Heller 2001). An innovative and autonomous leadership with a clear development project might be interested in building social capacity and furthering redistributive strategies, to widen its

own support base. Social movement theorists (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Tilly and Tarrow 2012) have argued convincingly that only social mobilisation can push for redistribution of power and resources. Thus, alliances between local leadership and social movements seem to be crucial not only to the emergence, but also to the resilience of a DDG regime. Without the ongoing support of these alliances, a weak leadership might be more vulnerable to co-optation, party pressures or clientelistic ties with strong interests within and outside state institutions. We hypothesise that the *emergence* of DDG is facilitated by the development of a close relationship between social movements and political leadership with the aim of occupying state institutions (Martínez & Wissink, 2021). This latter aspiration differentiates DDG strategies from Blaug's (2002) concept of "critical democracy" (for more on this difference see Bua and Bussu, 2021), which is concerned with building autonomous, radically democratic spaces that maintain a critical distance from the state. Following Bua and Davies' (2022) analysis of failed attempts to institutionalise radical participation, we hypothesise that maintaining close alliances with social movements and the grassroots base is a key determinant of the *resilience* of DDG once formal institutional power is achieved.

It is important to emphasise that the type of leadership required within any participatory project entails a capacity to coordinate and organise different interests and to foster mutual trust within coherent and committed partnerships. It has to be capable of motivating and aggregating interests, as well as guaranteeing continuity between the initial phase and the operational phase (Piselli 2005). DDG leadership often works within arenas infused "with value differences, conflicts, and mutual interdependence", whereby leadership requires "something other than traditional leaders with formal political authority which they exercise over others" (Bussu and Bartels 2014). Leadership thus becomes facilitative, which ensues not from formal political authority over others, but from working with others to achieve results through an inclusive process (Susskind and Crushank, 2006; Svava, 2008). In the context of radical municipalism in Spain, which generated multiple attempts at constructing DDG-like regimes (Roth et al. 2019), this was reflected in an ambition to "feminise" politics and political leadership, entailing a move towards more horizontal and cooperative styles of political leadership (Russell 2019). Within this context, political institutions are expected to play a different role in stimulating "multilateral exchanges, which will produce norms of behaviour and reciprocity" (Pinson 2002:14). This participatory and collaborative approach to local governance can often trigger resistance from local institutions, which may lack the capacity or willingness to decentre political power and competency. Displaced political agents can continue to constrain transformative projects, by mobilising enduring links to other layers of the state, business, civic and media interests (Bua and Davies, 2022). Furthermore, coalitions advocating DDG are likely to be homogeneous, resulting in internal feuds and disagreements that might weaken their governing capacity, or they might lack political experience and savviness to navigate complex local interests and address political and legal constraints (Blanco et al. 2019; Bua and Bussu 2021; Bua and Davies, 2022).

Civil Society and Social Movement Organisation

We expect high levels of associational activity to increase opportunities for social mobilisation, supporting progressive and transformative political projects and sustaining participatory governance (Fung and Wright 2003; Heller 2001). Stone (1993) argues that a key condition for progressive urban regime change is the sustenance of informed and engaged public support, which provides a crucial resource enabling greater regulation and extraction of concessions from elites. Following Tarrow's (2012) political opportunity structure framework, we can expect opportunities for these alliances to break through into state institutions at times of political or economic crisis, where increases in both incentives for collective action and associations' capacity to mobilise social capital combine with cleavages amongst governing elites to provide opportunities for change.

We should not, however, ignore that strong associations could also use participatory arenas to further corporatist interests and participatory governance could thus encourage collusive behaviours between community leaders and political elites while excluding weaker or non-organised interests (Tarrow 2012). Brought under the control of party and state structures or substituted with more technocratic forms of decision-making, even highly mobilised civil society can be subsumed, as the latter inevitably remains "dependent on the institutional and political environment for finding effective modes of engagement with the state" (Heller 2012: 661). Local associations themselves can be more or less collaborative, although this will often depend on the degree of inclusiveness displayed by the local leadership and/or how substantive the participatory project is perceived to be by social stakeholders.

Local State Autonomy

Institutional constraints and dynamics of multilevel governance inevitably affect the role and impact of local political projects. Political rivalries between national, regional and local government and political party formations at different tiers might affect policy outcomes, as certain local projects or partnerships might be ostracised at higher levels. With regard to higher jurisdictional levels the main constraints are often of an institutional nature, as the lack of coordination and a different approach to local planning and social policies might determine fragmentation of local initiatives. Devolution of responsibilities to regional and municipal authorities has been notionally advocated across many European countries since the 1990s (Bussu 2015). This has also raised expectations of a more active role on the part of the local leadership in addressing economic and development issues, particularly in the context of de-legitimised national parties. However, the remit of European local government is limited and reduced through austerity (Bua et al. 2018). The political platform of new grassroots coalitions is often beyond the regulatory scope of local government (Roth et al. 2019; Bua and Bussu 2021). Even in the context of a decentralised polity with high levels of effective local state autonomy, radical political projects and policy agendas, such as those underpinning DDG, are subject to higher-order constraints of the capitalist political

economy (Culpepper, 2015; Dryzek, 1996). Indeed, the socially transformative ambitions of DDG make it a political project that necessarily connects the local to the global, and different scales of government, as it aims to transform liberal democratic institutions and the political economy that unpins them. Finally, resistance from public servants and technocrats at different tiers can combine with the administrative inexperience of activists-turned-politicians to curb more radical ambitions, which in turn will diminish support from social movements, as initial ambitions are not realised (Blanca & Ganuza, 2018); Bua and Davies, 2022).

Economic Context and Socio-economic Performance

It is important to emphasise two dynamics in terms of economic context. On the one hand, globalisation appears to distance the economy from the locality, due to deregulation processes and high mobility of firms. On the other hand, there is renewed interest in the local context, beyond the endowment of natural resources and the geographical proximity to markets or what is referred to as the territory's comparative advantage. During the 1990s and 2000s, the focus was on the so-called competitive advantage (Crouch et al., 2001), or the local collective competition goods that a place can produce. As urban elites were increasingly forced to respond to the pressures of international capital and competition for job creation, issues of housing, social exclusion and social conflicts faded from the political agenda, while lower taxation became the indicator of good management (Le Galès 2002). The rhetoric of image and identity was given political priority to attract investments, with increasing emphasis on public-private partnerships. This was conducive to the emergence of GDD regimes across several European cities, with a strong focus on governance and partnership, as well as a growing rhetoric on citizen participation, which was easily incorporated into discourses of good governance, transparency and open government. However, the global economic crisis in 2008 and associated austerity policies (Blyth, 2013) refocused attention on social issues and played a crucial role in the rise of social mobilisation (Davies, 2021). The social fallout of austerity unleashed progressive movements and right-wing populism (Hopkin & Blyth, 2019). The two cases examined in this chapter illuminate these dynamics.

From this framework, we hypothesise that poor socio-economic performance within a context of political fragmentation generates opportunities for participatory regime change towards DDG, given the existence of progressive political leadership emerging from and working with a critical and organised civil society. The rest of the chapter tests this framework through a comparative analysis of GDD continuity in Nantes (Griggs et al., 2020) and the shift from a GDD to a DDG-like regime in Barcelona (Blanco et al. 2020, Bua and Bussu, 2021).

DDG and GDD Trajectories in Barcelona and Nantes

We focus on the cases of Nantes and Barcelona for their analytically relevant divergence in participatory governance trajectories (Bua et al., 2018).¹ Nantes

is paradigmatic of a functionalistic form of collaborative governance (Griggs et al., 2020) that strongly resonates with GDD. Barcelona was selected because it is paradigmatic of radicalisation witnessed since the financial crash and austerity politics (Blanco et al. 2020; Bua et al. 2018) leading to DDG (Bua and Bussu 2021). Until the implementation of austerity measures post-2008, the two cities shared similar GDD models of participatory governance, within a context of relatively successful post-industrial conversion and stable and continuous centre-left political leadership. With the global economic crisis, the onset of austerity and sharpened distributional conflict, the trajectories of participatory governance in each case diverged.

Political Leadership

Since the 1980s, Nantes City council has been governed by centre-left Socialist Party mayors, implementing a relatively successful post-industrial conversion to a service-oriented economy, accompanied by a “consensual and pragmatic” approach that makes heavy use of public-private collaboration and citizen engagement. This is the so-called “system Ayrault” (Griggs et al. 2020), named in reference to the mayor from 1989 to 2012. Jean-Marc Ayrault’s term and legacy have provided a stable political context to carry out reforms and develop a style of governance, which is equated by admirers to the slick touch-pass and move style of Nantes Football Club in the 1970s: “le jeu à la Nantaise”. The metaphor evokes images of collaborative and inclusive governance in the City, where all actors play an equally important part in constructing policy. This approach appears to have generated an important sense of local identity and pride among political elites. Since 2014, the current mayor, Johanna Roland, also made citizen participation a hallmark of her political style, renewing commitment to participatory governance and branding Nantes as the “citizen city”, promoting policies aimed at generating well-being, sustainability and citizen engagement (Griggs et al. 2020). The council committed itself to reinvigorating its participatory governance infrastructure, aiming to generate “constant dialogue” between councillors and citizens. Nantes’s approach continues to be touted as a good practice model in building a more democratic, efficient and green city, offering alternative forms of dialogue and resource coordination and innovation to overcome “wicked problems” associated with moves towards sustainable development.

The idea of collaboration in Nantes is firmly embedded, with practices of participation providing spaces for citizen input and for government to justify decisions. Griggs et al. (2020) argue that the “Nantes Game” is a novel way of dealing with the French model of public service delivery and the crisis of legitimacy considered to be engulfing the French Republic, whilst drawing on citizen expertise for effective and responsive service delivery and policy development. However, following Republican principles, decision-making ultimately resides with politicians and participatory spaces exclude actors engaged in contestation, including a wide range of urban activist groups who often avoid participating due to suspicion of top-down agendas. Fundamental discourses and decisions do not appear

to change as alternative views often become absorbed and transformed in the participatory process – raising questions as to how meaningful collaboration is in practice.

Like Nantes, political leadership in Barcelona City Hall during the transition to democracy was marked by long-standing electoral hegemony of the centre-left, led by Socialist Party Mayors Pascual Maragall (1982–1997) and Joan Clos (1997–2005). Under this context, the City developed an extensive political infrastructure for public engagement, alongside a tradition of intensive collaboration amongst public authorities, private interests and community groups, part of the so-called “Barcelona Model”. Many of these crystallised around the preparations for the 1992 Olympics, including public-private partnerships in urban regeneration and regulations establishing a series of participatory processes and advisory councils, particularly in social policy (Blakeley, 2007; Blanco, 2009). Alongside post-industrial conversation, this participatory infrastructure was made functional to a neoliberal growth model based on services and tourism. Opposition was successfully placated through the incorporation of actors from neighbourhood assemblies. By the turn of the century, this extensive GDD-like political infrastructure was mostly reduced to non-binding consultations heavily orchestrated by the council (Blakeley, 2007; Degen & Garcia, 2008) and had come to be perceived by critics as hollow, generating more fatigue than empowerment (Blanco et al. 2020).

Reflecting patterns observed throughout Spain, the 2011 elections returned changes in long-standing political leadership. For the first time since the transition to democracy a politically conservative administration was elected to city hall, led by Xavier Trias (2011–2015). His urban austerity agenda compounded provincial- and national-level measures, emphasising an intensified neoliberal logic, sought to boost the tourist economy, with enhanced public–private partnerships and subcontracting. The City’s participatory infrastructure was not rolled back, but neither was it invested in: it was left to wither on the grapevine (Blanco et al. 2020). However, as in so many other parts of Spain, Barcelona witnessed a sharp intensification of mass mobilisations against austerity during the early 2010s. The Indignados movement led to the emergence of a new national party, Podemos, which gained 21.2% of the votes in the 2016 general elections. At the municipal level, the 2015 elections were characterised by the victories of local movement-parties across Spain’s major urban centres (Roth et al. 2019). Barcelona was one of several cities where street movements became part of radical left platforms to contest municipal elections, bringing together the traditional left with new anti-austerity forces. In May 2015, led by a leading activist against housing evictions, Ada Colau, the BeC coalition won the municipal election, forming a minority administration. Under the banner of the “New Municipalism” (Blanco and Gomà, 2020), Barcelona City Council rolled out many initiatives in support of social justice, participatory democracy and feminism. The influence of social movements on agenda setting meant that participatory governance processes became linked to material concerns related to sharpened austerity, neoliberalisation and touristification. Colau was re-elected in 2019, with substantial support from social movements but upon weaker electoral position due to political developments to

be explained related to the rise of Catalan nationalism and the waning 15-M cycle of contention (Davies et al. 2022). Political leadership in Barcelona is therefore characterised by social movement collaboration, for example through public-commons partnerships, and much of its agenda seeks to advance radical democracy, cooperative economics, and develop new forms of social protection and de-commodification (Vlahos, this volume).

Civil Society and Social Movements

Much of civil society contention in Nantes revolves around social exclusions generated by its urban growth model. In the 2000s plans to construct a new airport at Notre-Dame-Des-Landes, some 20 km to the north-west of the city, became a nodal point for contentious politics (Griggs et al. 2020). Bubbling up since the announcement by central government of the new airport construction in 2000, conflict peaked in 2012 with the intervention of riot police to clear out protesters. The City's refusal to support local protesters initiated a crisis of legitimacy for both the sustainable development credentials of the city and its style of governance. Indeed, social movements had long disassociated themselves from the City's participatory infrastructure, seeing little strategic value in engaging. Griggs et al. (2020) describe the harsh criticism by oppositional actors of what they perceived as the tokenism of Nantes's GDD regime. Demands for deeper and more meaningful engagement, which the Nantes model no longer satisfies, are becoming more widespread amongst actors in civil society. Furthermore, anti-capitalist protesters organising against airport expansion occupied the construction land and sought to work alongside local farmers and citizens to generate autonomous spaces. Such critical actors have yet to constitute a counter-hegemonic discourse comparable to that of Barcelona en Comú but have succeeded in questioning the approach to urban governance, revealing the inability of managerial forms of participatory governance to accommodate more radical alternatives (Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2016).

In Barcelona, during the 1980s and 1990s, social opposition was contained by the incorporation of actors from neighbourhood assemblies (Blakeley 2005; Blanco 2009). Nevertheless, as social fallout accumulated and economic returns from the neoliberal boosterism of the so-called "Barcelona model" diminished (Delgado 2007), counter-hegemonic spaces emerged where social movements collaborated with critical public servants to develop alternative regeneration models. The hosting of the Universal Cultures Forum to showcase the city's burgeoning tourism industry also provided a focal point for protests from a variety of movements organising around urban privatisation and touristification. Such movements would find their claims vindicated by the sharpening of neoliberalisation and austerity during the Trias administration. Whilst some autonomous spaces for social innovation were met with acquiescence by the council for their potential to compensate for a retreating welfare state (Sánchez Belando, 2017), the social fallout from austerity fuelled and radicalised mobilisations. Movements such as the platform of mortgage victims (PAH) and the Indignados were especially strong

in the city, protesting against the privatisation of water, housing, public space, health and education. PAH emerged in 2009 in Barcelona and successfully spread around Spain, in protest to draconian mortgage and repossession laws. It successfully framed housing as a collective issue rather than one of individual responsibility over debt. Whilst the Indignados movement that famously swept Spain in 2011 had fizzled out by 2014, the political agenda it had articulated was incorporated by Podemos nationally, and at the municipal level by grassroots coalitions such as Barcelona en Comú (BeC).

Social movements such as the PAH were instrumental for BeC, providing channels for non-state actors to define priorities, as is evident in the content of policies, but also in BeC's horizontal style of governance (Font & Garcia-Espin 2019). BeC's platform was open and shaped by social movements' demands but sought to institutionalise participation by individual citizens rather than solely relying on associations' representatives. Therefore, citizens, even when members of social movements, political parties, trade unions or other organisations, participated on an individual basis together with non-affiliated citizens (Baiocchi & Ganuza 2016; Eizaguirre et al. 2017). Having entered office, a key strategy for BeC to overcome the structural and institutional barriers faced by DDG was to continue to leverage the political power of social movements, helping the administration strengthen the legitimacy of its message as well as exert pressure on higher tiers of authority to call for changes in regulations outside the scope of municipal action (Blanco et al. 2020). Indeed, under the conceptual umbrella of notions such as the urban commons and the social and solidarity economy, the new BeC government aims to foster an active and autonomous society capable of acting beyond the state sphere (see Salazar et al., this volume).

Local State Autonomy

During the 1980s and 1990s, both France and Spain were deeply influenced by the structural shifts away from national redistribution and urban managerialism towards urban self-reliance and entrepreneurship (Harvey, 1989). France is a highly de-concentrated state, with over 36,000 municipalities and mayors enjoying considerable powers and autonomy. Some scholars talk of "municipal presidentialism" (Mabileau 1995), whereby although mayors are not directly elected, there is growing personalisation of the municipal system (Kerrouche 2005). Political elites in Nantes were important actors and advocates of these metropolitanisation processes and promoted the setting up of ad-hoc mechanisms for intermunicipal co-operation in the metropolitan area (Pinson and Le Gales, 2005), which came to be known as "Nantes Metropole" by 2004. In formal terms, local autonomy would enjoy an added boost during austerity politics. In 2014 the French state devolved tax-raising powers as well as competencies in economic development and transport. The city of Nantes led the region's economic development planning, with broadly positive results. Nantes enjoyed generally positive socio-economic performance in the aftermath of the global economic crisis, which enabled local elites to develop urban development strategies that avoided the harshest impact of

austerity. Metropolitanisation has strengthened the city mayor, other mayors, and the executive, arguably leading to pork-barrel politics and risking citizen marginalisation from democratic decisions taken at the metropolitan scale (Bussu 2015). As seen in other European countries undergoing similar processes, participatory governance has often served to strengthen the visibility of mayors and their unmediated relationship with civil society to pursue flagship projects, whilst bypassing more structured participatory institutions (*ibid.*). At the same time, reductions in national government transfers, and tax reforms introduced in the early 2010s created greater fiscal pressure on the City Council, exposing it to significant budget cuts from 2016. Yet, the council retained a degree of fiscal autonomy, regulations allowing it to lengthen its balanced-budget cycle to mitigate these pressures. As Davies et al. (2022) explain, “perhaps the most significant lesson from Nantes ... is that with a modest degree of fiscal autonomy, a city can differentiate or even contrast itself politically with the national situation around it”.

The Spanish state is characterised by an asymmetric and relatively decentralised system of “autonomous communities”. Regional governments take responsibility for key services including education and health. Provincial governments have a more limited role, balancing service delivery between rural and urban areas, and municipalities have variable powers, which increase in large urban centres such as Barcelona. However, repeating a pattern observed throughout several European countries, including France, (Bua et al. 2018), the era of austerity signified substantive (re)centralisation of powers through cuts to services managed at the local level. Spain was one of the countries where this was exacerbated by the EU austerity memorandum, which led to the enforcement of fiscal consolidation targets for all Spanish administrations. The Organic Law on Budgetary Stability and Financial Sustainability in 2012 mandated balanced budgets and imposed debt ceilings for all levels of governments. The infamous “Montoro laws” for the Rationalisation and Sustainability of Local Administration forced local authorities to use any financial surplus for debt repayment, and an “independent” authority for Fiscal Responsibility was established to monitor compliance – similar entities were established in a number of Eurozone countries (Davies, 2021).

Centralisation exacerbated the aforementioned mismatch between the ambitious BeC policy agenda and the regulatory capacity of City Hall, and it is an important terrain of struggle. BeC made efforts to free municipal politics from the economic relations and institutions to which they are usually beholden, for instance through investment in community-wealth building, whilst deconstructing and rethinking the notion of the state–society relationship as a binary opposition. For this, and much like other “new municipalist administrations” it earned the outright hostility of actors at higher state scales, which obstructed otherwise routine governance arrangements (Bua and Davies, 2022; Blanca and Ganuza, 2018). Moreover, austerity rescaling measures added grist to the mill of the independence movement in Catalonia, which grew considerably after 2010 and provided an electoral competitor to BeC. Thus, the re-politicisation of the city and the democratisation of local institutions opened up new possibilities and imaginaries but also coincided with an intensification of constraints on autonomy. Combined with

relatively low levels of administrative-political experience of activists-turned-politicians and the tumultuous political environment of the Catalan independence conflict and the Spanish state's counter-attack to the municipalist movement (Bua and Davies, 2022), these severely limited BeC's capacity for government.

Economic Context and Socio-economic Performance

The recent history of Nantes is that of a relatively successful post-industrial conversion, from an economy based on shipbuilding to a service-led one specialising in IT and banking (Griggs et al. 2020). Under the context of political stability described above, urban regeneration policies aimed at strengthening the international competitiveness and distinctiveness of the city. For example, Nantes positioned itself as a "green city" (Griggs et al., 2020) culminating with the award of European Green Capital in 2013. This success is widely attributed to an urban growth agenda based on large-scale urban regeneration projects in neighbourhoods and industrial heritage sites, and a city branding strategy based on sustainability (Davies et al. 2022).

In Bua et al.'s (2018) analysis of urban austerity governance in five European cities, Nantes appears as somewhat of an anomaly for its relatively positive socio-economic performance. A growing population and tax base meant that it managed to avoid the sharpest edges of austerity, despite being affected by national-level issues such as increased unemployment and cuts to local government services (also Davies et al. 2022). However, inequality increased following the global economic crisis with poorer households experiencing sharp reductions in income, leading policymakers to focus on how to engender more inclusive growth, but within the same political and economic model. City officials used the term "décrochage" to capture the idea that these neighbourhoods had become de-coupled from the vibrant growth of the rest of the city (Griggs et al. 2020). The policy challenge was thus framed as re-connecting these communities rather than questioning the current socio-economic model. The possibility of this endeavour is underscored by political elites in terms of differentiating economic management in Nantes from broader patterns of urban austerity, a language which local politicians found uncomfortable (Davies et al. 2022). Instead, they articulated a confident sustainable growth mentality, emphasising the city's capacity to employ counter-cyclical strategies to mitigate the impact of national-level cuts.

Barcelona also underwent similar processes of urban restructuring during the 1980s. Centre-left city leaders engaged in a form of neoliberal urban boosterism based on leveraging international events such as the 1992 Olympics to build the City's profile as a tourist attraction. Facilitated by further permissive planning law implemented by 1990s national-level conservative governments (Martí-Costa & Tomàs, 2016), as well as the substantial liquidity of global financial markets at the time, the construction of new homes and other forms of urban construction accelerated substantially, as did private debt and broader processes of financialisation (Blanco et al. 2020). The staging of the 1992 Olympics crystallised the "Barcelona Model" of urban governance (Blakeley 2005; Blanco 2009),

including the development of a service and tourist-based economy, with the use of great events as catalysts for regeneration.

Whereas the Barcelona post-Olympic growth model is widely touted as a success, critics argue that it led to increased inequalities, gentrification, touristification and resulting displacement and social cleansing (Delgado 2007; Martí-Costa and Tomas 2017). The socio-economic fallout from these processes was exacerbated by national austerity policies following the financial crash of 2008. Unemployment rose to 18.6% in 2012, with 18.2% of the population at risk of poverty in 2011 (Bua et al. 2018). The Trias administration (2011-2015) sharpened neoliberal boosterism and touristification. The social fallout led to the radicalism and popular appeal of the urban change agenda espoused by BeC. Since 2015, their economic strategy has focussed on regulating tourism, overturning privatisation and engaging in community-led forms of economic development, often based on cooperative ownership and the social economy. However, this ambitious agenda has been constrained by the limited regulatory capacity of City Hall, compounded by hostility from other state scales and a local “pro-status quo coalition” (Blanco et al. 2020).

Discussion

The previous section tells a story of two cities which developed post-Fordist economies and relatively similar participatory governance infrastructures. The ability of both to generate consent and legitimacy diminished as the neoliberal boom years subsided, with latent urban alternatives growing against established urban governance models in both cities. However, in Nantes, this model would survive the social fallout from austerity, whereas in Barcelona this provided the basis for radicalisation in pursuit of democracy-driven governance. The analysis we have provided contributes to explanations of this divergence. Table 11.1 summarises the key details from each case.

In Nantes, the decades-long leadership of socialist mayors ensured a stable political context while at the same time reducing the space for political contestation and closing down windows of opportunities for a more radical project of democratisation. This political environment has opened the path to a top-down vision of transformation, which has shifted power from non-state actors to technocrats and consultants. Similarly to what Heller (2001: 664) observed when examining the missed opportunities for civil society in South Africa under the ANC, “the power that flows from electoral dominance has, in other words, come directly at the expense of participatory democracy”. Griggs et al. (2020) note that the French republican tradition sees the state as the primary actor to advance social solidarity, whereby “public officials and politicians claim to embody the general interest, while negating opposition from groups who are deemed to promote merely sectional interests” (Griggs et al. 2020: 14). As the power and visibility of local political elites, and mayors in particular, grew through decentralisation reforms, it also curbed the significance of other democratic structures, making participatory governance ancillary to the mayor’s vision of economic development.

Table 11.1 A Framework to Understand Emergence of DDG

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Nantes GDD</i>	<i>Barcelona DDG</i>
Leadership/ Political Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained centre-left leadership since the 1980s, successfully adapted to urban entrepreneurialism • Commitment to collaborative governance and citizen participation • Lack of effective opposition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political stability and successful adaptation to urban entrepreneurialism • Competing governance imaginaries with rise of counter-hegemonic movement after global economic crisis • Heightened political contestation post-economic crisis and window of opportunity for social movements to “enter the state” • Alternative urban agenda pursued since 2015, in connection to material concerns raised by social movements and attempts at establishing more radical forms of participatory governance
Civil Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of alternative movements around airport protests successfully questioning urban governance but falling short of establishing counter-hegemonic movement • Opposition partially contained by GDD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-option of critical civil society until alternative movements developed in response to sharpening social fallout and diminishing returns • Radicalisation and consolidation of alternative forms of governance with 15-M cycle of contention • Emergent “New Municipalism” bringing social movement agendas into local state
Local Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contextual shift from redistribution and managerialism to urban self-reliance and entrepreneurialism • Successful adaptation by urban political elites to neoliberal shift • Relative autonomy from central state allows for economic strategy containing impact of austerity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in state autonomy with EU and national austerity measures • Mismatch between DDG aspirations and municipal powers • Hostile state constrains governance
Local Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful post-industrial conversion (Banking and IT) • Avoids sharp edges of austerity due to growing population and tax base • Increases in inequality and “décrochage” post-2008 crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful post-industrial conversion (service and tourism) • Diminishing returns to urban model during the 2000s • Sharpening of neoliberalisation and social fallout post-2008 economic crisis

In Barcelona, similar patterns of citizen engagement had developed under the stable leadership of the Catalan Socialist Party between 1979 and 2011. When in 2011, following the economic crisis triggered by the global economic crisis and in a context of widespread discontent with punishing austerity measures, a Conservative-liberal coalition took power, the electoral arena became more competitive. This dramatic change in government, by destabilising local power dynamics, also opened opportunities for more radical political projects led by a well-organised civil society already galvanised by the momentum of widespread protests across the country. Barcelona's civil society vaunts a long history of mobilisation and enough operational autonomy to be able to align with the local state whilst containing risks of co-optation. A new national-level movement party, Podemos, had emerged from a coalition of intellectuals and social movements and helped to orchestrate the necessary political consensus for reform at national level. Getting the politics right, and specifically having a proper balance between political power and civil society, was therefore crucial for DDG to emerge. This fortunate conjunction of different factors in Barcelona appears highly dependent on the heightened political contestation of the post-financial crash period. Political instability might also make any new institutional gains precarious. Changes in government will represent a litmus test for the resilience of new participatory institutions, unveiling genuine popular consensus (or exposing lack thereof) on the role of participatory democracy in redefining the relationship between citizens and state institutions.

Both Nantes and Barcelona's experiences show how GDD and DDG relied on routinised forms of participation to facilitate dialogue between citizens and the administration, highlighting a preference for permanent and embedded structures. This proceduralisation poses a dilemma: if it is too loose, it is difficult to safeguard the process against the erratic developments of political cycles; however, where it is excessively rigid it could constrain the experimental nature of democratic innovations and, like in Nantes, turn participatory spaces into a hollow site of legitimisation of top-down decisions (Bussu 2012). DDG sits between routinised participation and protest politics. Thus, in the long term, continuous alliances with social movements and local civil societies might be able to guard it against risks of bureaucratisation. Furthermore, international constituencies for radical reforms and cross-border alliances with other new municipalist cities, and the local and global social movements supporting them, might prove an effective strategy to reform democracy from the local level up.

One of the interesting differences that emerged from the comparison between Barcelona and Nantes was the impact of socio-economic conditions combined with varying degrees of autonomy enjoyed by local government. Relatively positive economic performance in Nantes, combined with relatively more flexibility in meeting debt obligations under the leadership of a centre-left national government under Francois Hollande, allowed City leaders to use their powers in pursuit of different strategies of economic development from the national government, shielding the urban economy from the harshest impacts of austerity. Barcelona, although enjoying considerable autonomy compared to many European cities of

similar size, was subjected to the harsh (re)centralisation of fiscal powers by a Conservative government responding to the 2012 EU memorandum, as a consequence of deeper cuts to public services, privatisation and outsourcing of many of its functions. The grievances fuelled by these recentralisation processes also contributed to already complex centre-periphery relations, with growing popularity of separatist parties on the left and right of the political spectrum. A combination of economic and political instability opened a window of opportunity for a transformative political project.

Barcelona's alliance between left-wing political formations and social movements that led to local institutions' occupation and transformation vaguely resembles the relationship between the Workers' Party and the neighbourhood associations that transformed Porto Alegre's budget approval process by introducing Participatory Budgeting, in the aftermath of the long military dictatorship in Brazil (Baiocchi 2005). However, Barcelona en Comú's ambitions have been curbed by the relatively limited remit of local government's financial autonomy and decision-making powers. In a context of centralisation and privatisation, where citizens are now primarily consumers, the project for a deeper democracy must align necessarily with one for a decentralised democracy and strengthened local government (Bua and Escobar, 2018; Bussu 2015). BeC's DDG regime is still fragile, as it faces age-old power equations pitting bureaucrats against civil society and institutional logics against mobilisational logics and de-mobilisation associated with the waning of the 15-M cycle of contention, whilst the media often rallies against policies that threaten local powerful interests. However, Barcelona's case also shows how local government is "often an arena where alliances across the state-society boundary can develop and produce synergistic outcomes" (Heller 2012: 660).

Conclusion

This chapter has reflected on factors that might favour the emergence of a DDG regime, by comparing two European cities which initially shared similar post-industrial economies and DDG-like governance structures: Nantes and Barcelona. The global economic crisis and ensuing austerity politics had different impacts in each of these two cities, whereby Nantes was able to shield its economy and municipality from the worst effect of austerity and therefore safeguard the legitimacy and stability of its political elites. On the contrary in Barcelona, the social and economic fallout destabilised the political environment, leading to greater contestation, which a well-organised civil society was able to exploit, carving out a window of opportunities. The fragile DDG regime in Barcelona with its ambitions for radical reforms is however constrained by local state capacity, as reduced competencies of local government following cuts and outsourcing pose severe limits to the impact of radical forms of participatory governance. This makes DDG vulnerable to political cycles – in many other Spanish cities, changes in government marked the end of the new municipalist experience (Bua and Davies, 2022). Ultimately, the resilience of DDG initiatives

will likely depend on whether there is a popular consensus for deepening the scope of democracy.

Note

- 1 This research mainly draws upon UK Economic and Social Research Council-funded research (ES/L012898/1) undertaken in eight cities between 2015 and 2018, exploring dynamics of collaborative governance under austerity. It references now-published work on both cases from this project (e.g., Blanco et al., 2020; Bua et al., 2018; Davies, 2021; Davies et al., 2022; Griggs et al. 2021; Griggs and Howarth 2020).

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