



ISSN: 2036-5438

**Empowering Local Democracy In Catalonia: Tools And  
Policy Domains To  
Implement a Top-Down Solution**

by

Lluís Medir Tejado

Perspectives on Federalism, Vol. 4, issue 1, 2012





## Abstract

This article is the result of an ongoing research into a variety of features of Spanish local government . It aims, in particular, at providing a profile of the tools implemented by local authorities to improve local democracy in Catalonia. The main hypothesis of the work is that, even though the Spanish local model is constrained by a shared and unique set of legal regulations, local institutions in Catalonia have developed their own model of local participation. And the range of instruments like these is still now increasing. More specifically, the scope of this research is twofold. On the one hand, different types of instruments for public deliberation in the Catalan local administration system are identified and presented, based on the place they take in the policy cycle. On the other hand, we focus on policy domains and the quality of the decision-making processes. Researching the stability of the participation tools or whether local democracy prefers more “ad hoc” processes allows us to analyze the boundaries/limits of local democracy in Catalonia. The main idea underlying this paper is that, despite the existence of a single legal model regulating municipalities in Catalonia, local authorities tend to use their legally granted self-management capacities to design their own instruments which end up presenting perceivable distinct features, stressing democracy in different policy domains, and in diverse policy cycles. Therefore, this paper is intended to identify such models and to provide factors (variables) so that an explanatory model can be built

## Key-words

local democracy, participation, public policies, local self-government



## 1. Introduction

Democracy is a vast and complex concept. It includes a lot of features that need to be reduced if we want to make it useful for our purposes. In this paper, local democracy refers basically to those political processes that incorporate the participation of citizens or local associations in the local policy-making process. This article is organized as follows: the first part focuses on the subject with some definitions and key concepts; the second part explains the institutional and legal framework in which political participation is embedded at local level, and also points out the theoretical basis of how participation has been treated by scholars; the third part describes the situation in Catalonia and identifies the relevant variables to be analyzed. And finally, results are shown and a discussion made.

Our research topic is not related to “non conventional” ways of participation (such as non authorised public demonstrations, boycotts, violent protests, resistance to public obligations...), nor to “classical” ways of participation, more related to the question of creating and promoting democratic representation (through elections, party affiliations, having meetings with elected and institutions, advocacy...)<sup>1</sup>. Our article is focused on the “macro” level (aggregated data), regarding administrative structures and the institutionalisation of participation processes. We are facing here a sort of “third way” in that benefits are not exclusively related to create and promote democratic representation, nor to express political wills far away from an institutionalised political channel.

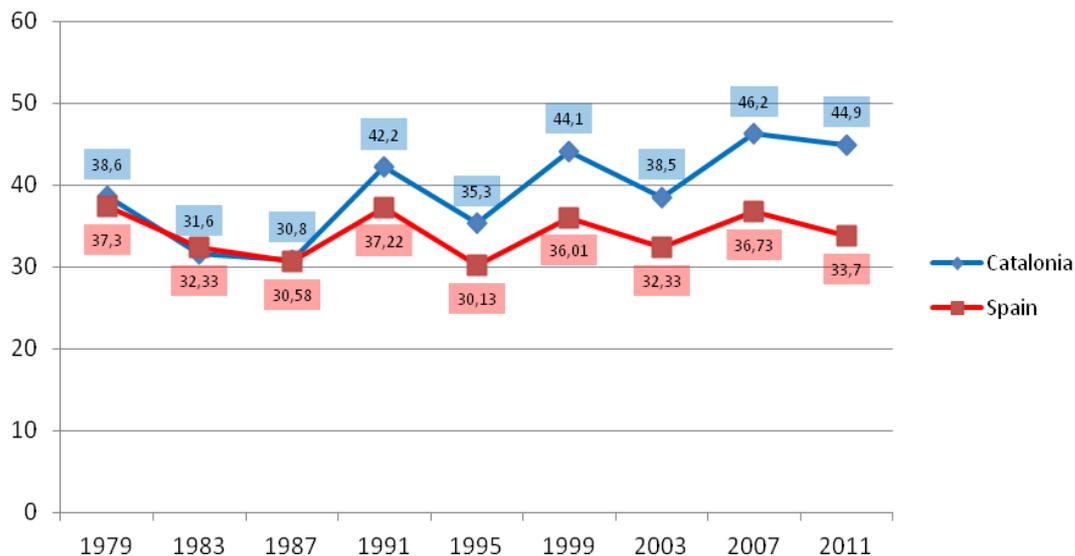
Following Mendelberg’s position concerning local participatory processes, the theory of deliberative democracy starts from the state that “egalitarian, reciprocal, reasonable and open exchanges among citizens about public issues will lead to a number of individual and collective benefits”. And she highlights “among these (*benefits*) greater empathy and tolerance, a better understanding of one’s own views, and those of others, the building of consensus, a more engaged, active citizenry, and decisions that are more reasoned and attuned to the larger public good” (Mendelberg, 2002; Shapiro, Delli Carpini, & Shapiro, 2002).

This paper addresses several topics which have particular significance in the changing world of local government, but one of the most important is related to the growing



pressures to incorporate participatory and direct forms of democracy within local governments (Blanco & Gomà, 2002; Bucek & Smith, 2000; Font, McLaverty, 2003; Subirats, 2001). Much of the time, the aim of these pressures is to revive the limited electoral participation in elections (especially local elections). In fact, the turnout at local elections in Catalonia is decreasing fast and deeply, becoming structurally low compared to the rest of Spain<sup>II</sup>.

Graph 1. Abstention (%) from local elections in Spain and Catalonia



Source: data from Ministerio del Interior, Spain.

In this increasingly complicated scenario, it would seem logical to initiate strategies to encourage citizens to return to democratic participation and real involvement in public affairs.

The main questions that the article aims to treat are closely related to the classic problems in political science and local government studies: how do local governments encourage local participation? What are the intentions of it all? Are citizens ready to participate? Under what terms? In any case, the core question remains: elected politicians are responsible for making decisions in representative democracies, so why would they



want to share the power that the law gives them and thus limit themselves? (Font et al., 2003; Font, 2003)

As Font remarks, the debate is still about the reaction of any local players towards citizen participation. Those reactions will represent a combination of beliefs and instrumental motivations (Font, 2003) Politicians (like other local players) will be in favour or against each citizen participation proposal depending on what they gain from it. Wherever the process starts, the key players accept it as a legitimate process. The justifications for participatory experiences come basically from two main arguments: they are either done to get better policies or to get better polities (Font et al., 2003). In fact, institutional structures are important because are the vehicle through which the basic purposes and values a society wishes to pursue through local governments are carried out (Judge et al., 1995).

In this paper we are focusing on the institutionalisation of participatory processes at local level. We are going in depth into the creation of better polities, because we do not yet have data regarding the quality of the participatory processes. The main hypothesis of the paper is that, even though the Spanish local model is constrained by a shared and unique set of legal regulations, local institutions in Catalonia have developed their own model of local participation; but to what extent we are facing a “top-down” directed process but largely dominated by local strategies?

## 2. Brief description of a unique legal framework

As a case representing the classical Napoleonic structure of local government, the Spanish, and also the Catalan local systems, are constrained by a shared and unique set of legal regulations. Moreover, fragmentation and smallholdings are also relevant features of the local system. Catalonia numbers up to 947<sup>III</sup> municipalities – Spain has up to 8,115 –, four provinces (Barcelona, Girona, Lleida and Tarragona) and a regional government (Generalitat de Catalunya).

Table 1. Distribution of municipalities in Catalonia by population





Population size in inhabitants	Barcelona		Girona		Lleida		Tarragona		TOTAL Catalunya	
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
Up to 500	16.752	72	25.359	97	28.912	117	17.213	67	88.236	353
501-1.000	23.170	31	29.081	41	35.233	50	24.442	35	111.926	157
1.001-5.000	213.957	88	133.732	57	107.419	53	128.401	58	583.509	256
5.001-20.000	777.415	80	199.969	20	88.040	10	165.422	17	1.230.846	127
20.001-50.000	621.193	21	150.331	5	0	0	103.188	4	874.712	30
50.001-100.000	752.809	12	81.220	1	0	0	94.407	1	928.436	14
100.001-500.000	1.064.632	6	0	0	118.035	1	121.076	1	1.303.743	8
More than 500.000	1.582.738	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.582.738	1
Total	5.052.666	311	619.692	221	377.639	231	654.149	183	6.704.146	946

(1): Total number of inhabitants; (2): Number of municipalities

*Source: Innovacio democratica, 2007 and MUNICAT.*

The legal bases for local participation are scattered through multiple norms<sup>IV</sup>. In any case, local governments are considered from a legal point of view as “immediate channels for citizen participation in public affairs” (art. 1 LBRL).

Basically, local councils in Catalonia could engage three main instruments for public participation:

- Consultations
- Participatory organisms
- Participatory processes



Each of these instruments fulfils some of the needs to activate public participation, and allow citizens to express several points of view. Besides that, there are other procedures that include public hearings and consultations to stakeholders, but we are not taking them into account in this paper because they are compulsory following administrative laws.

Consultations are like referenda, but at local level and related to local issues. They need to be approved and authorized by the Spanish government (art.71 LBRL). Participatory Organisms are conceived as stable mechanisms that allow regular participation of citizens in different topics, and in different stages of the public policy process. Participatory procedures are non-stable mechanisms (or “ad hoc” processes) that allow public participation during a delimited and restricted time; like organisms could be associated in any stage of the public policy process. These two last instruments could be binding or not and depend only on the political will of the council<sup>V</sup>. The city council allows the decisions made by citizens to be binding at the decision stage. Besides all this regulation, each local council has the autonomy to decide what kind of instruments it is going to implement, in which stage of the policy process, in which domain, and can limit the political effects. In short, we have a widespread regulation and a wide scope of decision for the local governments in order to promote local democracy.

To try to counteract this potential chaos, some “top-down” solutions have been proposed in recent years. The most important one is the creation by the Catalan Government, in January 2004, of an agency called “Direccio General de Participacio Ciutadana” (DGPC) with the mission of promoting public participation in the design, implementation and monitoring of government policies (either of the Regional Government and Local Governments in Catalonia). Its main goals are encouraging, studying and disseminating the positive values of political and social participation with the final objective of enriching the quality of democratic life. Its creation was an important issue for the new leftist government in place (starting from may 2003) after 23 years of rightist governments.

As an organism of the Regional Government (the Generalitat) the role of this organism is quite complicated regarding local governments, due to the restriction attached to the autonomy of local governments. The Generalitat can only offer support regarding



participation in local policies. The DGPC offers economic aid (through grants, credits, and public subsidies), formation and an institutional recognition of initiatives being carried out locally. It cannot impose decisions, or regulate in a homogeneous way for all local governments, except by parliamentary law being completely respectful of local powers and the autonomy established by the Constitution.

## 2.1. Theoretical assumptions and conceptual frameworks

The scientific literature regarding local democracy is divided into two main groups of approaches or conceptual frameworks<sup>VI</sup>. Some are more attached to a normative conception of the need to empower local democracy (Blanco, Lop, 2004; Blanco, 2008; Font et al., 2003; Pares, 2009; Subirats, 2001; Putnam, 2000). Others are more analytical, and mostly attached to effects and limits of local participation in both individuals and institutions (Aars, 2007; Font et al., 2003; Salisbury, 1975; Shapiro et al., 2002; Wolman, 1995; Zafra Victor, 2003; Zittel, 2007a; Zittel, 2007b). In a correlative way, there are critics and partisans of local participation.

For the believers on the necessity of a renewal of the decision-making process at local level, Putnam –and its notion of social capital– is a prompter leader. Concerning benefits for the community, Putnam has argued that the efficiency of a local government and the economic development of an area may be strongly influenced by the active engagement of the local citizenry in community affairs (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993). Following Putnam's ideas, the community's social capital will increase as people bring deliberation to their civic activities (Putnam, 2000). In general the main arguments in favour of public participation are that: it leads to an improvement of the decision-making processes; it represents pluralism in a better way; it helps legitimise public decisions; it allows more control over elected representatives; it increases accountability and political culture; and finally builds up a better perception of politics (Chaqués & Palau, 2006; Marti Marmol, 2010).

Contrarily, those who are not so optimistic regarding public participation argue that: there is a high complexity in terms of implementation of good processes for having only simply and partial solutions; these processes are economically expensive; public opinion could be easily manipulated; low rates of participation could affect the process itself, and



even the classical democratic representative system; polarization in deliberation could increase social divisions; and users become engaged in single issues and devote little attention to common public good (Aars, 2007; Marti Marmol, 2010; Zafra Victor, 2003). In conclusion, and following Zittel's "Critics of participatory democracy claim that it is solely driven by normative concerns without opening itself up to empirical inquiry and to empirical testing of its claims. Proponents are pictured as utopian dreamers obsessed with the question of how things should be rather than how things can be in real world settings" (Zittel, 2007b).

In any case, theories of political participation are characterized by a certain ambivalence regarding popular participation. Theories of democracy do not agree on how much participation is healthy for democracy. The defining idea of democracy is that the people govern their own affairs. Participation thereby reflects a population's self-government. In this scenario some projects aim to strengthen traditional representative channels of participation, whereas others promote more direct participatory forms. (Aars, 2007).

In general terms, the analytical approach focuses on the fact that it is not self-evident that more possibilities for participation automatically result in an improved local democracy. In fact, more channels of involvement certainly do imply a greater choice of means by which citizens can express themselves politically. However, if democratic arenas are being fragmented into a greater diversity of forms one must assume that the individual has the resources to orient him or herself in a complex landscape (Aars, 2007). In this sense, "more channels of influence do not necessarily lead to more people becoming involved in political work, but simply that those who were already active acquire more ways to make their influence felt" (Aars, 2007).

One of the first and most important analytical approaches was an article that Robert H. Salisbury published in the *American Journal of Political Science* in 1975. The article, named *Research on Political Participation*, opened the way to the analysis of public participation as a phenomenon far larger than election: "participation is understood to involve several quite different types of activity and of activists, and also to vary according to the institutional setting in which it occurs" (Salisbury, 1975).

Salisbury (1975) distinguishes up to three lines of intellectual usage of political participation, which are part of the theoretical foundations in our times:



- 1) Political participation is regarded as a legitimizing act.
- 2) Instrumental participation. Here participation is seen as a necessary way of gaining political power.
- 3) Participation as a solvent of social conflicts.

After Salisbury's article, other models to explain the uses of political participation had been created. However, regarding local politics we are taking as a referent the distinction made by Zittel (2007a; 2007b), Font (2003) and Salisbury (1975). Following these scholars, four strategies of empowering local democratization had been identified:

1. **Integrative democratization:** In this model institutions are a factor that shapes goals and perceptions of individuals. Democracy must be learnt and this can be ensured only through relevant institutional frameworks that empower people by educating them. Here participation is regarded as a "democratic school" for citizens (Zittel, 2007b).
2. **Expansive democratization:** This strategy aims to increase the utility of political participation by expanding rights to participation. Expanding rights to participate has qualitative rather than quantitative connotations. It cannot increase solely by increasing the number of opportunities or channels to participate but rather increases by allowing for certain forms of participation in contrast to others (implement direct democracy or making binding decisions, more than consultative and deliberation instruments).(Zittel, 2007b)
3. **Efficiency oriented democratization:** Here Zittel stresses a conception of political institutions as incentive systems that patterns the player's strategic behaviour. The basis being that political apathy is a result of a negative cost-benefit effect. So the strategy of efficiency-oriented democratization sees the solution as lying not in increasing the benefits of participation, but rather in lowering costs (Zittel, 2007b).
4. **Instrumental participation:** Participatory processes are implemented to legitimise or strengthen either local elected or local stakeholders. This model usually attracts citizens who are most interested in participating, fostering the participation of



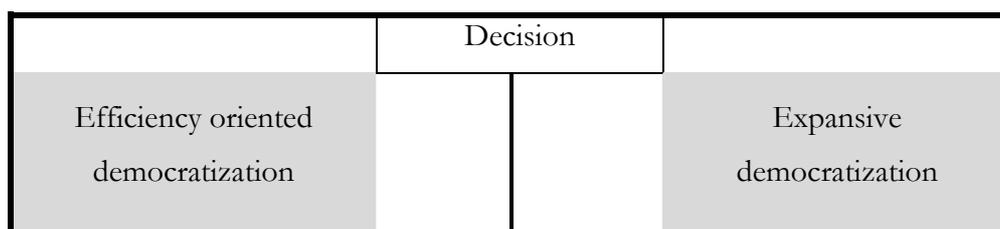
organised groups to the detriment of the capacity of non-organised citizens to participate (Font, 2003; Salisbury, 1975).

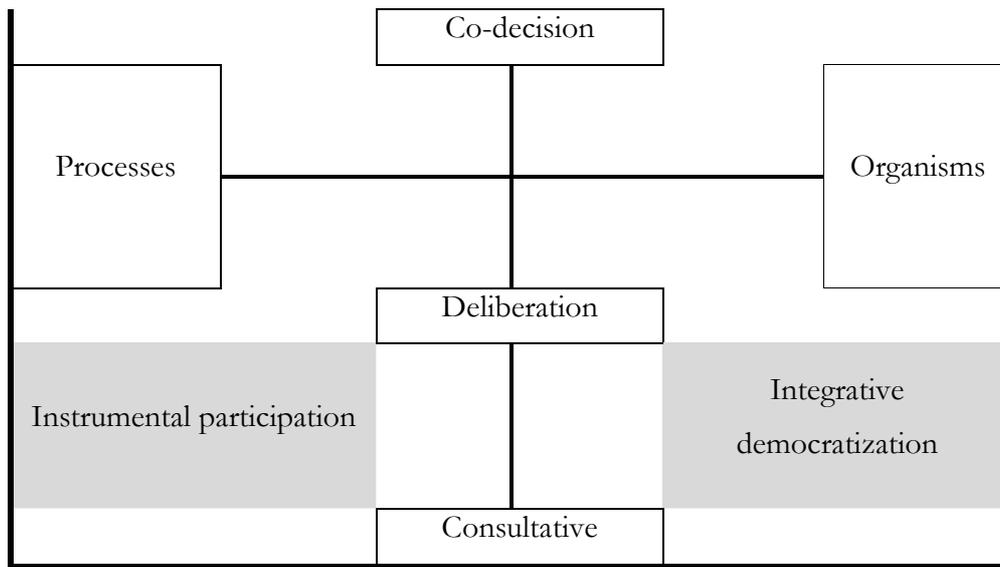
Whereas we want to follow analytical approaches, trying to avoid as much as possible normative ones, we are focusing on those four strategies mentioned above. These four strategies of democratization could allow us to define some models of local participation, having always in mind that they include components or categories without assuring relation among variables (Judge et al., 1995). In this sense, even if our work has a strong empirical basis, the model construction in this stage of the work tends to be deductive, more than inductive<sup>VII</sup>, and with limited effects.

Because this is a preliminary exploration, simple models of analysis were chosen to allow future further study on the material. To classify the data, models were constructed to classify the data using the categories of commitment envisaged by 611 municipalities<sup>VIII</sup>, both for organisms and processes. Nevertheless, we must emphasize that models “are representations or stylized and simplified pictures of reality. They include the most important components or categories, but they do not posit relationships among variables” (Judge et al., 1995).

As analyzed in the theoretical assumptions, we are particularly taking two main axes in order to create models of local participation. In the vertical one we find the degree of public involvement in the decision-making process, from consultation (low coercion) to decision (could be binding). In the horizontal axis we can find the stability of institutions (in the left wing we find processes, in the right wing we find stable organisms). As can be seen in the figure below, the modelisation of the democratization of policy-making processes at the local level -according the data we count with-, can be presented as follows:

Figure 1. Models of democratization





Source: own creation.

Obviously, it would be impossible to fit each of our 611 municipalities clearly in one or another model. For correctly adapting models and municipalities we need qualitative analysis and to go in depth into the reality of each municipality. Moreover, not all of 611 had created participatory processes.

### 3. Identification and characterisation of a heterogeneous reality

In order to have in mind a wide landscape of what we are talking about, it seems necessary to make some general descriptions concerning the participatory processes in Catalan municipalities. If we assume that one of the most important topics in local governments is related to the growing pressures to incorporate participatory and direct forms of democracy, we must analyze its evolution and present situation.

In absolute numbers we count up to 874 instruments of public participation at local level from 1978 to 2008. As Table 2 shows, these instruments are distributed following these patterns: 156 municipalities that had engaged a stable organism of public participation; and up to 206 municipalities had engaged some kind of participation process. In disaggregated terms (classifying municipalities by having a single instrument, both of them or without an instrument), 90 municipalities had only created stable organisms, 140 municipalities had only created processes and 66 municipalities had created both types of



instruments. That means that almost a half of the Catalan municipalities of more than 500 inhabitants have already created some kind of participatory instrument by themselves.

Table 2. Distribution of instruments by municipality

Total 1978-2008		Number of municipalities
Organisms	549 (62'8%)	156
Processes	325 (37'2%)	206
Total	874 (100%)	

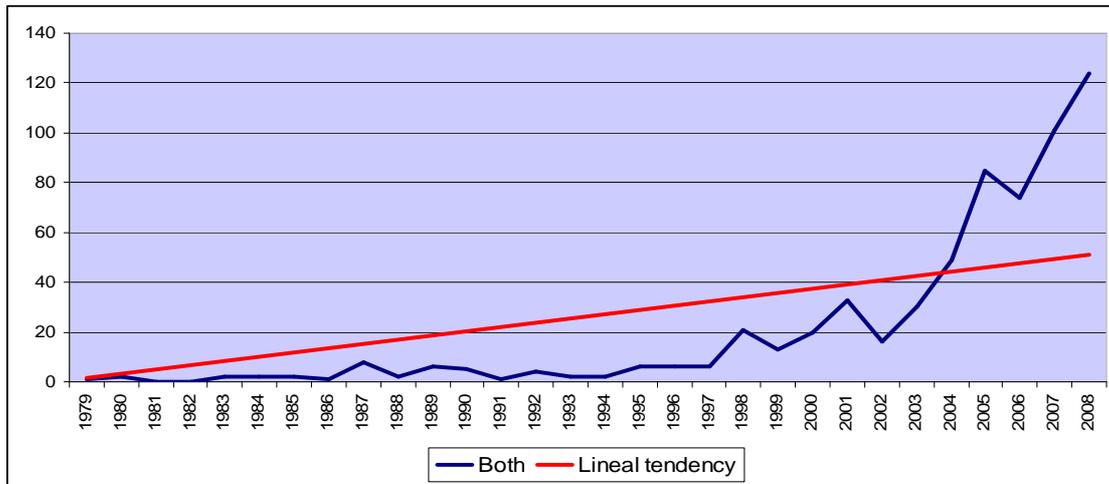
  

Instrument	Municipalities	% over 611 municipalities
Only Organisms	90	14,80%
Only Processes	140	22,90%
Both instruments	66	10,1%
Total	296	48,4%
Without instruments	315	51,6%

*Source: own treated data from Pi i Sunyer Foundation*

Regarding the evolution in time from 1978 to 2008 the increase of these instruments has really been, in general terms, impressive in absolute numbers. The evolution by year shows a kind of participation euphoria starting from late 90s.

Graph 2. Evolution in absolute numbers in time from 1978-2008, both instruments added



*Source: own treated data from Pi i Sunyer Foundation*

As graph 2 shows, the creation of participatory instruments really began in the late 90s. Until that moment, participatory processes were not part of the local political agendas. In fact, if we take from 1978 to 1997 years, a mean of 1.52 participatory processes were created each year. However, if we take the mean from 1998 to 2008, the mean increases up to 25.8 participatory instruments created each year. Another relevant pattern of institutional behaviour, but not shown in the previous graph, is that the increase is not distributed in a homogeneous way among instruments. The first instruments that show an increase are the more stable ones (organisms), while the increase of processes began later, but seems stronger.

Regarding the degree of public involvement in the decision-making process, first we have to consider a methodological point. All organisms and processes could include several own degrees. For example: the first stages of an education plan could consist of consultation, and afterwards there would be some phases related to the decision itself. It means that the same process could include first a deliberation stage, and afterwards a co-decision stage<sup>IX</sup>. In general terms, the large majority of both instruments are embedded in the consultation and deliberation stages of the policy-making process, while co-decision and decision are real laggards. So, in a broad sense, the public involvement in the policy-making process has a low political impact on decision-making process.



Table 3. Level of involvement in policy-making process

		Organisms	Processes	Total			
N	Valid	524	313	837			
	Missing	25	12	37			
Both instruments							
Involvement		N	%	Involvement		N	%
<b>Consultative</b>	no	140	16,7	<b>Co-decision</b>	no	662	79
	yes	<b>697</b>	<b>83,3</b>		yes	<b>175</b>	<b>21</b>
Total		837	100	Total		837	100
<b>Deliberation</b>	no	547	65,3	<b>Decision</b>	no	813	97,1
	yes	<b>290</b>	<b>34,7</b>		yes	<b>24</b>	<b>2,9</b>
Total		837	100	Total		837	100

*Source: own treated data from Pi i Sunyer Foundation*

Taking all the instruments together, 83.3% of them are of a consultative nature in one or another phase; 34.7 % are of a deliberative nature; 21% allow citizens to decide with elected; and finally, only 2.9% have an exclusive decisional nature.

If we divide the analysis by instrument, we find some significant differences. The distributions of the percentages mentioned above are somehow influenced by the type of instrument. The main differences we find are focused on the co-decision involvement. Processes seem to be used in a different way than organisms. In fact, deliberation and co-decision are exchanged. Only 10.9% of processes are created for deliberation, while 34.5% of them are created for co-decision processes. Inversely, 12.7% of organisms are devoted to co-decision, while 48.9% of them are created to deliberate. So, processes seem to be more used as instruments for helping elected decisions than organisms, which are more related to deliberative and consultative issues.

We are focusing now in the distribution of instruments by policy domains. Here we find that there is not a pattern of similarity in the use of instruments by policy domain. As table 4 shows, heterogeneity is the dominant factor, and the use of these instruments does not seem to have any clear pattern of specialization, except urbanism -which is strongly



related to processes, up of 52.2%-. None of the other policy domains follow any clear pattern. But, there is still another fact that makes difference. From the total of policy areas that are affected by those instruments, processes have a mean of 1.65 policy area per instrument, while organisms have a mean of only 1.04 policy area per instrument. That means that processes are more all-purpose oriented, whereas organisms are closely focused on a unique domain.

Table 4. Policy domain\* by instrument

<b>Processes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Organisms</b>	<b>%</b>	
Urbanism and territory	52,2	Education	15,1	
Public spaces	21,7	Global	12,6	
Strategic planning	13,2	Culture	10,7	
Sustainability	11,3	Environment	8,3	
Young people	11,3	Aged people	6,2	
Others	11	Young people	5,8	
Women	6,9	Welfare	5,6	
Budget	6,6	Urbanism	5,1	
Education	6,3	Health	3,2	
Living together	6,3	Women	3	
Social cohesion	5	Immigration	2,4	
Aged people	3,8	Others	25,8	
Childs	3,8			
Equality	3,1			
Immigrants	2,5			
		N	Proc.	Org.
		Valid	318	531
		Missing	7	18

\*the % does not sum up to 100 because each instrument could have more than one policy domain.

Source: own treated data from Pi i Sunyer Foundation



Despite this ambiguous distribution, it is possible to notice that, on one side, organisms had four policy domains that reached the barrier of 10%: global approach (12.6%), culture (10.7%), education (15.1%) and others (25.8%). On the other, processes had six policy domains with more than a 10% of presence: Strategic planning (13.2%), public spaces (21.7%), Urbanism (52.2%), sustainability (11.3%), young people (11.3%) and others (11%). Given this fact, we can deduce that both instruments are somehow dedicated to different topics: processes slightly more devoted towards everything concerning urban planning and development, while organisms are slightly more committed towards topics related to fundamentals of living together (education, culture, and global approaches of the city).

Another important factor, besides policy domains and public involvement, is the territorial scope of these participation instruments. Our territorial scope is divided into three possibilities, going from the whole city to the neighbourhood. Here we are focusing our attention on the dimension of problems that face participatory instruments<sup>x11</sup>. In other words, it is not the same being demanded to participate to “solve” or discuss something related to your neighbourhood (whether we should plant cork oaks or only green grass in the main square), than something related to the whole city (something like, where and how to place the rubbish incinerator).

Table 5. Territorial scope of policy instruments

Processes		N	%	Organisms		N	%
City	no	52	16,3	City	no	36	7,1
	yes	267	83,7		yes	472	92,9
	Total	319	100		Total	508	100
District	no	313	98,1	District	no	499	98,2
	yes	6	1,9		yes	9	1,8
	Total	319	100		Total	508	100
Neighborhood	no	285	89,3	Neighborhood	no	493	97
	yes	34	10,7		yes	15	3



		Total	319	100			Total	508	100
N	Organisms	Processes							
Valid	508	319							
Missing	41	6							

*Source: own treated data from Pi i Sunyer Foundation*

The territorial scope of the Catalan participatory processes is mainly focused on a large territorial scope, the whole city. Possibly to prevent the NIMBY effects. NIMBY could be defined as: “the protectionist attitudes of oppositional tactics adopted by community groups facing an unwelcome development in their neighbourhood” (Dear, 1992). Obviously, it is possible to find NIMBY effects affecting the whole city (big infrastructures with a general impact), but having more dissipated interests in an extensive participatory process could avoid disputes and quarrels among close neighbours. However, discussing and participating in terms of the whole city could discourage individual citizens from participating in it, whereas big associations and organised stakeholders could have more incentive to take part<sup>XI</sup>.

### 3.1. Relevant variables

Arriving at this point, after a preliminary description of the complex landscape of participatory instruments created by local governments in Catalonia, we want to analyze some other relevant variables that may affect the increase of these political phenomena. We want to test some exogenous variables that may affect the process of institutionalisation we are analyzing, focusing on those identified in the scientific literature. They are mainly grouped around three concepts: classical ways of participation; size and population variables; and political and institutional factors.

First of all we will take some classical participation variables (elections) as potentially explanatory of the increase of participatory processes. Several scholars pointed to the dramatical decrease of participation in local elections, and the absence of a local political clear interpretation of these results in aggregated terms (Botella, 1992; Capo Giol, 1991). In this respect, other scholars claim that this lack of classical participation needs to be



compensated and complemented by other participation channels (Blanco & Mas, 2008). Even “The introduction of formulas of citizen participation beyond elections should not only preserve but also foster the capacity of representation of the diverse interests in public decisions” (Font, 2003). So, the decreasing rates of participation should have an influence on the rise in participatory instruments.

Another set of relevant variables regarding local politics are still those related to size and population. The discussion about size, efficiency and democracy is a “perpetual” ongoing debate (Keating, 1995). Regarding specifically democratic issues, the key point is “what structures can best secure citizen control over government and proper accountability” (Keating, 1995). In other words, smaller units will enhance local democracy, while larger units -being remote from the citizen- discourage active participation and empty the concept of local democracy of its content (Keating, 1995). In this set of variables we want to analyze whether the size of the Catalan municipalities has an impact on the institutionalisation of participatory processes. If Keating’s assumptions are correct, larger municipalities should have more participatory processes than smaller ones.

The last packages of endogenous variables we want to test are those related to political factors. First, we are going to analyse whether the political tendency of the mayor has any relevance. We suppose that municipalities directed by Mayors belonging to left parties are more prone to establish such mechanisms, while Mayors belonging to right parties do not. The second variable we are going to analyze is the top-down processes engaged by the regional government. Basically we are trying to find out whether the creation of the “Direccio General de Participacio Ciutadana” has been somehow relevant in the institutionalisation of participatory processes at local level. Some scholars wonder if it is possible to promote bottom-up involvement by means of top-down strategies. The danger being always: “Is democratization policy a program for strengthening popular political participation or for controlling it?”(Aars, 2007)

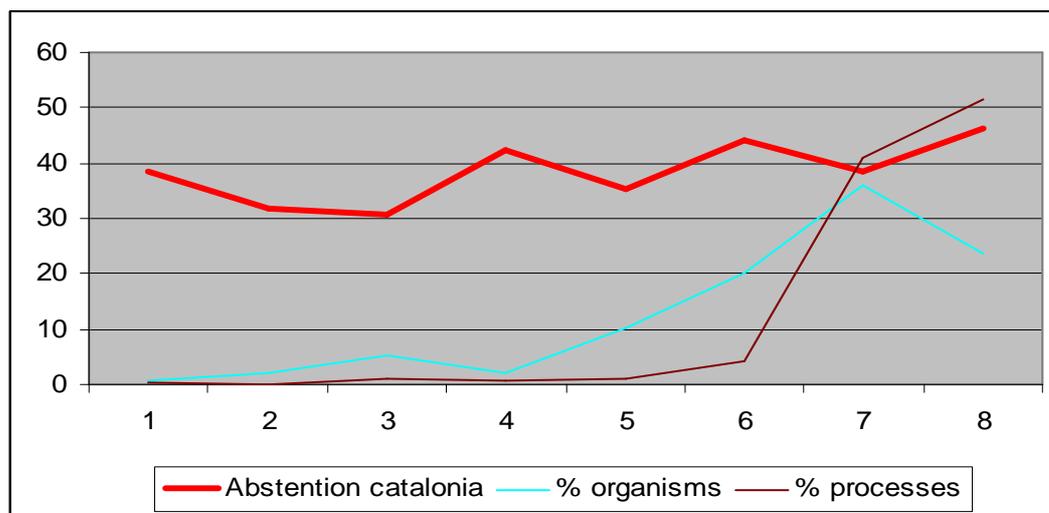


## 4. Results and discussion

To what extent is abstention a main variable for understanding the increase of participatory instruments? The analysis of correlations illustrates that there is not a correlation between the percentage of abstention in electoral processes and the creation of participatory instruments in absolute numbers. In fact, none of the variables gives a significant or moderate correlation (except organisms and processes among them). However, the fact that we count with a small N -only eight elections- could introduce some bias, and maybe we will have to wait for some more.

These results allow us to tentatively assert that normative pressures coming from stakeholders have been probably more effective in the creation of participatory processes than the real fact of abstention. As graph 3 shows, abstention as a percentage remains almost constant, while the percentage of creation of participatory instrument by legislature increases during the sixth local election period. So changes in the creation of participatory instruments are not related to electoral abstention in aggregated terms. If abstention does not change in a spectacular way, it may mean that the real change is based on the perceptions of it. Scholars and politicians may analyze now abstention as a problem, while 20 years ago they did not, and it was not necessary to do anything about it.

Graph 3. % of abstention and % of creation of participatory instruments by legislature



Source: own treated data from Pi i Sunyer Foundation



As mentioned above, the number of inhabitants could appear as a variable affecting participatory processes. Following Keating's assumptions, probably smaller units do not need to empower local democracy. By contrast, large units will need more participatory instruments to involve citizens in politics and democracy.

We have used the same division as is envisaged in the Basic Law on Local Government, but we have incorporated additional sub-divisions into the lower ranges to avoid the accumulation of cases in one type. As mentioned above, the Catalan municipal map is full of smallholdings and really fragmented. This accumulation of town councils in the lower bands made it preferable to introduce an additional division to ensure a more detailed approach. The municipalities were therefore divided as follows: 500-1000, 1001-5000, 5001-10000, 1001-20000, 20001-50000 and more than 50000.

As table 6 clearly shows, population matters. There are main differences among instruments and due to the size of the municipality. Taking all 611 local governments together, the % of those that engage participatory processes vary by size and instruments. In general terms, larger populations tend to use more stable organisms than processes, while small municipalities tend to use more processes than stable organisms.

Table 6. % of use of instruments within population

Localities by population	Processes	Organisms
	% of localities having at least one	% of localities having at least one
500-1000	30,7	9,2
1001-5000	35,5	17,9
5001-10000	42	45,9
10001-20000	56	52,9
20001-50000	55,2	78,1
over 50000	84,2	100

*Source: own treated data from Pi i Sunyer Foundation*



One of the most significant data is that 100% of local governments of over 50,000 inhabitants have at least one stable organism of participation, and it is also relevant that a 78.1% of those between 20,001 and 50,000 do so. In general, the percentage increases with population bands. Regarding small municipalities, it is important to note that they prefer processes rather than organisms. So, there's a kind of specialisation of instruments according to population. Indeed the public involvement tends to increase the more the number of inhabitants diminishes. Big cities tend to use stable organisms with low public involvement, while small cities use more processes with "stronger" local involvement. Regarding political and institutional variables, in Catalonia there are up to five main political parties. Two of them could be classified as "right" parties (CiU and PP), and three of them could be classified as "left" parties (PSC, ERC and ICV). For the issue of participation we are not taking into account the other "cleavage" that affects the political parties in Catalonia, which is "Catalan nationalism" and "non Catalan nationalism". We believe that any relevant relation will be focused on the "right-left" axis.

There is no relevant relation between political party and the engagement of participatory processes. The only parties that seem to have special characteristics are those placed in the extreme of the "right-left" axis: ICV (green and post-communist party) is very engaged in participatory projects while the Partido Popular is very reluctant to engage in participatory processes. However, they have a very small N in comparison to the other three parties. This fact could introduce some bias in interpretation.

In general terms we cannot identify clear patterns of behaviour, but it's possible to deduce that the PSC (the party which governed Barcelona City Hall and the Regional Government in 2008) had the "equilibrium" among the two extreme cases (PP and ICV) while the other two parties (CiU and ERC) were more sceptical about participation. It is also relevant that processes are better accepted than organisms, in terms of a higher percentage of implementation, all parties considered.

Table 7. % of municipalities by political party having at least 1 instrument

Political party of the Mayor	Processes %	Organisms %	Mean of %
ICV	85,7	50	67,9



PSC	45,3	42,7	44
CiU	37,4	24,9	31,1
Others	35,6	23,9	29,7
ERC	37,8	16,2	27
PP	0	25	12,5

Source: own treated data from Pi i Sunyer Foundation

The last political variable we want to take into account is the creation of the “Direcció General de Participació Ciutadana” (DGPC). We must remember here that it was created in January 2004, only a few months after the victory of a coalition of three left parties (PSC-ERC-ICV) for regional government, after 23 years of government by the same party, CiU. This change represented a political shift in several topics, and one of them was the idea of promoting large and extensive participatory processes. This General Direction is conducted by ICV, one of the most engaged political parties in these issues (and as well their local Mayors, as shown above).

By analyzing the role played by this governmental agency, we want to take into account whether the evolution of the institutionalisation of local participatory instruments is somehow conducted by a “top-down” policy. In order to understand the impact of this governmental agency, we are focusing on the year of creation of the first participatory instrument engaged by each municipality. So, as graphic 4 shows, the distribution of “newcomers” to participatory engagement has clearly risen since 2003. Before 2003, participatory mechanisms were not in the local government’s agenda. This figure allows us to consider that there is a relationship between the creation of the agency and the political will to promote local democracy at local level. Moreover, if we take the mean (both processes and organisms) of “newcomers” from 1979 to 2003 and the mean from 2004 to 2008, the numbers speak for themselves. In the last 5 years, almost 43 new municipalities –each year- engaged for the first time a process or an organism empowering local democracy.

Table 8. Number of newcomers per period and instrument

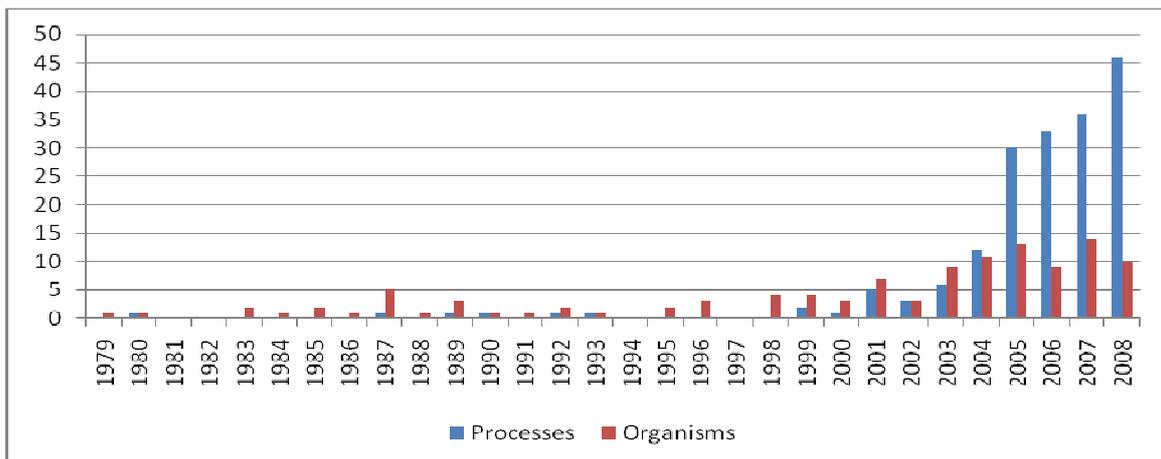
	1978-2003	2004-2008
--	-----------	-----------



	Processes	Organisms	Processes	Organisms
<b>New comers</b>	23	57	157	57
<b>Mean</b>	1,0	2,38	31,4	11,4
<b>Total mean</b>	3,3		42,8	

Source: own treated data from Pi I Sunyer Foundation

Graph 4. Absolute numbers of first participatory instruments created by year



Source: own treated data from Pi I Sunyer Foundation

These data speak for themselves but the final proof of the impact of the Catalan government's top-down policy is the correlation analysis. As table 9 shows, there is a significant, and very strong, correlation among the presence or absence of the DGPC and the creation of new instruments. It is necessary to note that the statistical correlation is strongly positive: 0.849 for organisms and 0.923 for processes. That means that there's a very strongly positive linear dependence between the presence of the DGPC and the arrival of newcomers.

Table 9. Correlations between year of creation of first participatory instrument and presence of DGPC.



		Year of creation Processes	Year of creation Organisms	Presence DGPC
Year of creation Processes	Pearson Correlation	1	,826**	,923**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,000
	N	30	30	30
Year of creation Organisms	Pearson Correlation	,826**	1	,849**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,000
	N	30	30	30
Presence DGPC	Pearson Correlation	,923**	,849**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	
	N	30	30	30

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

#### 4.1 Discussion

The main objective of the paper was to study how participation in local Catalan Governments is being institutionalised. To what extent institutional processes conducted and created by local governments show common patterns of behaviour. We decided to take a picture of the state of the process up to 2008, following the models and variables identified by the literature. Summarizing briefly, the main findings of our introductory research allow us to identify some patterns of local institutional behaviour regarding the democratic empowering process carried out in Catalonia.

Is it possible to fit our data within the theoretical models mentioned above? Obviously the response is going to be partial and incomplete, because we are analyzing aggregated data. Rigorous “micro analysis” could partially confirm, or even deny, some of our conclusions. Recognition of municipal autonomy extends to what is known as the



principle of self organisation, which reinforces the freedom of municipalities by letting them set up their own organisational structure. This opens the door to a plurality of forms that is difficult to embed in any of the models previously distinguished. Nevertheless, following the two main axes we have identified (see figure 1), we can tentatively assume that the model of democratization that is being implemented by local governments is somewhere in between the “integrative democratization” and the “instrumental participation model”.

After the statistic analysis of data, it is now clear that the participatory tools created are more stable than precise interventions, and require little public involvement. In total we count 62.8% of organisms, of which only 2.9% and 12.7% are embedded in decision or co-decision stages of the policy-making processes. Moreover processes (representing 37.2%) are embedded largely in a consultative stage (83.3%). Even so, processes are more used in the co-decision stage than organisms, allowing more qualitative participation of citizens. In other words, very few organisms are involved in the decision stage. The figure of processes involved in the co-decision stage is only slightly higher.

Despite the larger number of existing organisms, processes are expanding faster. The use of “ad hoc” instruments seems to be more accepted in recent years, and further analysis is needed in order to determine if its adscription to the co-decision level of public involvement is also increasing.

Regarding policy domains, we cannot conclude any solid pattern of use in general terms. We can deduce that processes are more all-purpose oriented, whereas organisms are focused on a unique domain. Besides, organisms and processes are dedicated to slightly different topics: processes are slightly devoted to urban planning and development, while organisms are more related to fostering social groups and creating social capital. Moreover, both kinds of instruments focalize participation on the whole city, avoiding small units (and also small interests) like districts or neighbourhoods.

We were also willing to interpret some other political variables that could affect the institutionalisation of participatory processes. Firstly, abstention. According to some scholars, the decrease of “classical” participation will create the necessity of promoting other participatory channels. Our findings tend to contradict this vision. Abstention in local elections does not seem to be related to new participatory instruments. We are more inclined to consider that what has really changed is the perception of abstention in



politicians and governments. Scholars and politicians see now abstention as a problem, whereas 20 years ago it was not. Trying to justify the political need to empower democracy, abstention is used more as a normative argument, than a real causal argument.

Population matters. The bigger the city, the more stable and more consultative are the instruments implemented. A large majority of big cities have more organisms than processes, and more related to consultative and deliberative stages. Contrarily, small cities use fewer organisms but more processes, and are slightly related to co-decision stages.

Finally we found out that politics (in terms of party affiliation) does not really matter. Local factors, more than the general political mood, could explain the institutionalisation of participatory processes. Related to party affiliation, we find the establishment of one particular top-down process to empower local democracy as a relevant explanation. In fact, the apparition of the “Direcció General de Participació Ciutadana” has been important in terms of the enlargement of number of municipalities involved in creating participatory instruments. We can affirm that the DGPC has been determinant in the increase of municipalities offering new channels of participation. The question remaining is what kind of participation has been encouraged by it?

Local autonomy prevents very intrusive top-down policies. The DGPC only has promoting capacities; and within this framework, the DGPC has promoted the creation of more processes than organisms -less expensive and with smaller bureaucratic needs, than stable organisms-. The DGPC has legal and political barriers to impose a vision and a direction over local governments. The final decision over contents and effects of participatory policies created by municipalities belong only to its political wishes. To find out the reasons why the institutionalized model created until now lies somewhere in between the “integrative democratization” and the “instrumental participation model”, we need to explore further both the top down processes engaged and the adaptation of those policies to the reality of each local government.

In any case it seems that the question of why elected politicians want to share the power, and thus limit themselves, needs to be reformulated. It's true that local elections are increasingly creating participatory processes; but what is the sense of all that if low impact on the policy-making process is the norm?



## References

- Aars, J., 2007, "Democratic renewal in local government?" in Zittel, T. - Fuchs D. (eds.) *Participatory democracy and political participation*, Routledge, London, 202-221
- Blanco, I., 2008, "Revisando el debate acerca de la participación ciudadana: cual era la pregunta?" *Inguruak. Revista De Sociologia*, 43-52
- Blanco, I., & Goma, R., 2002, *Gobiernos locales y redes participativas* Barcelona: Ariel
- Blanco, I., Lop, I., 2004, *Pressupostos participatius, per on comencem?*, Barcelona: Fundació Jaume Bofill
- Blanco, I., Mas, P., 2008, *La desafecció política a Catalunya. Una mirada qualitativa*. Barcelona: Fundació Jaume Bofill
- Botella, J., 1992, "La galaxia local en el sistema político español", *Revista De Estudios Políticos*, 145-160.
- Bucek, J., & Smith, B., 2000, "New approaches to local democracy: Direct democracy, participation and the "third sector", *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 3-16
- Capo Giol, J., 1991, "Elecciones municipales pero no locales", *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 143-164
- Chaques, L., & Palau, A., 2006, "Gobernanza", *Manual de ciencia política*, Madrid; Tecnos
- Dear, M., 1992, "Understanding and overcoming the NIMBY syndrome", *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 288-300.
- Font, J., 2003, "Local participation in Spain: Beyond associative democracy", *Public participation and local governance* ICPS, 125-146
- Font, J., McLaverty, P., 2003. *Public participation and local governance*. Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials
- Judge, D., Stoker, G., & Wolman, H., 1995, "Urban politics and theory: An introduction", in Judge, D., Stoker - G. - Wolman H. (eds.), *Theories of urban politics* Sage, London, 1-12
- Keating, M., 1995, "Size, efficiency and democracy: Consolidation, fragmentation and public choice", in Judge, D., Stoker - G. - Wolman H. (eds.) *Theories of urban politics*, Sage, London, 117-134
- Martí Marmol, J., 2010, *Participació democràtica a l'ambit municipal i la consulta ciutadana sobre la reforma de la Diagonal de Barcelona*
- Mendelberg, T., 2002, "The deliberative citizen: Theory and evidence", *Political decision-making, deliberation and participation*, 151-193
- Pares, M., 2009), *Participación y calidad democrática: Evaluando las nuevas formas de democracia participativa*. Barcelona: Ariel.
- Putnam, R. D., 2000, *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York etc.: Simon & Schuster
- Putnam, R. D., Leonardi, R., & Nanetti, R., 1993, *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University press
- Salisbury, R. H., 1975, "Research on political participation", *American Journal of Political Science*, 323-341
- Shapiro, R. Y., Delli Carpini, M. X., & Shapiro, R. Y., 2002, *Political decision-making, deliberation and participation*. Amsterdam etc.: Elsevier Science.
- Subirats, J., 2001, *Experiències de participació ciutadana en els municipis catalans*. Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya. Escola d'Administració Pública de Catalunya.
- Vallès, J. M., 2006, *Ciencia política: una introducción*, 5a actualizada (ed.). Barcelona. Ariel.
- Wolman, H., 1995, "Local government institutions and democratic governance", in Judge, D., Stoker - G. - Wolman H. (eds.), *Theories of urban politics* Sage, London, 135-159
- Zafra Victor, M., 2003, *Órganos y estructuras de participación social. La ley de modernización del gobierno local* Barcelona: Fundació Carles Pi i Sunyer, 47-56
- Zittel, T., 2007a, "Conclusion: Can participatory engineering bring citizens back in?", *Participatory democracy and political participation* Routledge, London, 223-228
- Zittel, T., 2007b. "Participatory democracy and political participation", Zittel, T. - Fuchs D. (eds.), *Participatory democracy and political participation* Routledge, London, 9-28



<sup>I</sup> As the classic distinction among “conventional” and “non conventional” political activities recognizes (Vallès, 2006).

<sup>II</sup> Local elections all take place at the same time throughout Spain. It is true that participation in local elections is decreasing in aggregated terms, but it’s nuanced by the size of the municipality (in small municipalities we find high rates of participation whereas abstaining prevails in large cities).

<sup>III</sup> Note the difference with the total number of municipalities in Table 1. This is because the last municipality, which raises the sum to 947, was created in May 2010

<sup>IV</sup> The Spanish Constitution (arts. 9.2, 6, 23, 29, 87.3 and 92), the Autonomous Statute of Catalonia (arts. 29 and 122), the Spanish law of basis of local government (known as LBRL arts. 1, 18, 24, 69, 70bis, 71, 72). Moreover, Barcelona has its own regulations, and the government of the province of Barcelona encourages the creation of participatory processes

<sup>V</sup> And, of course, it only affects local competencies.

<sup>VI</sup> By conceptual framework we mean “ways of looking at or conceiving of an object of study. They provide a language and a frame of reference through which reality can be examined and lead theorists to ask questions that might not otherwise occur”(Judge, Stoker, & Wolman, 1995)

<sup>VII</sup> “Empirical theory can also be deductive, starting from a premise or set of premises and deducing conclusions about causal relationships and behaviour from these premises. The premises may or may not be empirically valid, but utilizing them produces plausible results about and an understanding of (that is, explains) reality” (Judge et al., 1995).

<sup>VIII</sup> The universe of our study covers municipalities with more than 500 inhabitants. That means 611 Catalan municipalities.

<sup>IX</sup> This is because data shown in most of the tables changes in comparison to the total number of instruments.

<sup>X</sup> Again here we can find processes or organisms that have several territorial scopes.

<sup>XI</sup> The costs of information are higher for individuals than organized associations, which in fact is Font’s main argument: “the predominant participation model has fostered the participation of organised groups to the detriment of the capacity of non-organised citizens” (Font, 2003).