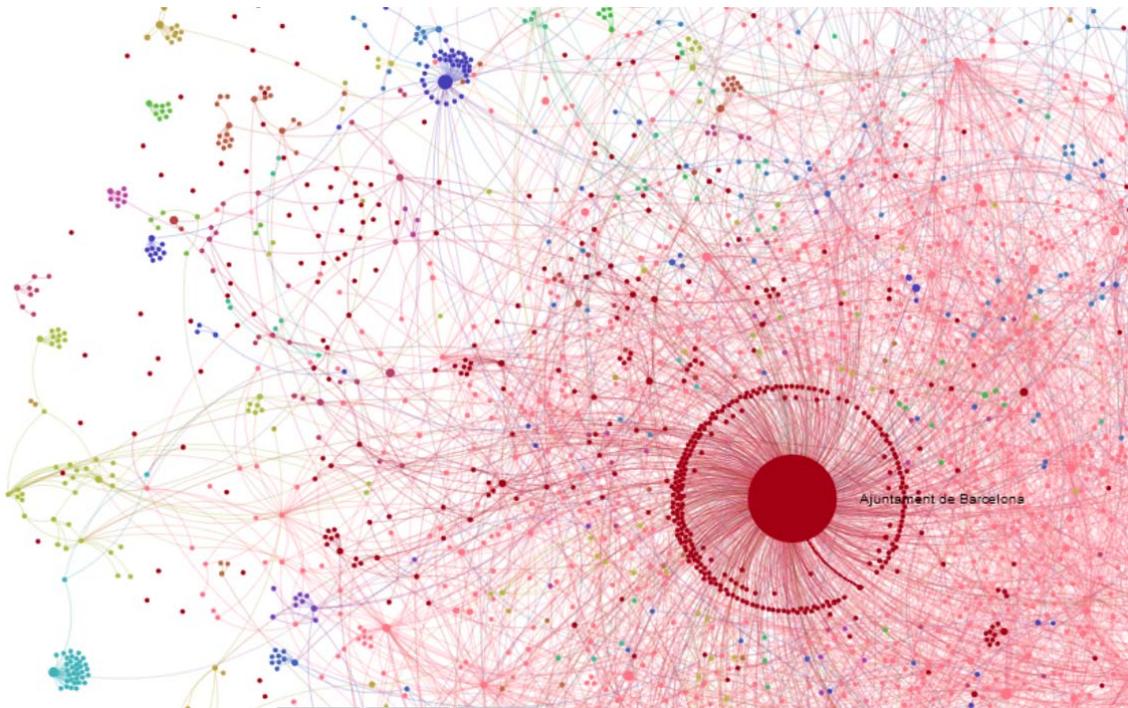


Technopolitics, ICT-based participation in municipalities and the makings of a network of open cities.

Drafting the state of the art and the case of *decidim.Barcelona*



Ismael Peña-López

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Foreword

This research is part of the *Voice or Chatter? Using Structuration Framework Towards a Theory of ICT Mediated Citizen Engagement* research project led by IT for Change and carried on under the Making All Voices Count programme.

The research began in May 2016 and is about to end by January 2017.

The project consists in analysing several cases of ICT mediated citizen engagement in the world, led by governments with the aim to increase participation in policy affairs.

This subproject deals with the case of *decidim.Barcelona*, an ambitious project by the City Council of Barcelona (Spain) to increase engagement in the design, monitoring and assessment of its strategic plan for 2016-2019.

These specific pages focus on the socio-political environment where this subproject takes place, specifically speaking Barcelona, Catalonia and Spain, for the geographical coordinates, and for the temporal coordinates the beginnings of the XXIst century and most especially the aftermath of the May 15, 2011 Spanish *Indignados* Movement or 15M – with some needed flashbacks to the restauration of Democracy in 1975-1978.

The working paper *Technopolitics, ICT-based participation in municipalities and the makings of a network of open cities. Drafting the state of the art and the case of decidim.Barcelona*, thus, aims at explaining how and why such an ICT-based participation project like *decidim.Barcelona* could take place in Barcelona in the first months 2016, although it will, of course, relate to the project itself every now and then.

Technopolitics and ICT-based participation in municipalities and the makings of a network of open cities.

State of the Art draft

Ismael Peña-López

Introduction

In September 2015, Madrid – the capital of Spain – initiated a participatory democracy project, [Decide Madrid](#) (Madrid decides), to enable participatory strategic planning for the municipality. Less than half a year after, in February 2016, Barcelona – the second largest city in Spain and capital of Catalonia – issued their own participatory democracy project: [decidim.barcelona](#) (Barcelona we decide). Both cities use the same free software platform as a base, and are guided by the same political vision.

The success of the initiatives and the strong political vision behind them have caused the outburst of plenty of other initiatives around the whole state – and most especially in Catalonia – that are working to emulate the two big cities.

The present document aims at providing an overview of policy and regulatory architectures that governs and supports citizen voice, online and off-line, including a brief critique of ICT-mediated citizen engagement in the participatory democracy project [decidim.barcelona](#) and, by extension, in this new network of open cities.

Political background

In March 11th, 2004, Spain suffered its worst terrorist attack ever. Al-Qaeda claimed the killing of almost 200 people in Madrid, after bombing several trains during rush hour. The event happened three days before the general elections to the Parliament – which decide the Prime Minister – and one year after the government of Spain supported the invasion of Iraq against the will of almost the entire Spanish population.

For three days, the official version of the Ministry of Home Affairs was that, despite all evidence, the attack had been authored by the Basque terrorist organization ETA (Traficantes de Sueños, 2004). Besides not acknowledging a more than likely cause-effect of the invasion of Iraq, the war on ETA had historically been electorally beneficial for the party then in office.

Suspicious of fraud – moral fraud at least - Spaniards threw themselves into the World Wide Web to obtain information from third parties, as Spanish media were either under the control of the government or, at least, not challenging the official version. International outlets such as *The Guardian*, *The Süddeutsche Zeitung* or *The New York Times*, among many others, provided a much different story from the one held by the Ministry and local newspapers.

Enraged after becoming aware of the consensus in the world outside Spain about the veracity of the version that blamed Al-Qaeda for the attacks, hundreds of thousands of citizens self-organized, via SMS, to demonstrate in front to the headquarters of the party in office, which ended up losing the elections against all odds.

From 2004 to 2011, the Spanish political arena became a continuum of all kind of citizen initiatives where ICTs played a major role, especially in accessing extra-institutional information and circumventing democratic institutions to coordinate and engage in political action. Having learnt that all kind of information was available and that horizontal communication was a real possibility, platforms, groups, gatherings and all kind of extra-representative and extra-institutional ways of organization flourished during the years, weaving a dense but distributed network of activists which both self-organized and synced in their ideas, protocols, tools and procedures.

Finally, on May 15th, 2011 came the outburst of the 15M Spanish Indignados Movement. Hundreds of thousands took the streets and squares of dozens of cities in Spain demanding better democracy by camping on them for a full month. The reasons that gathered the citizens on the streets –and, later on, in local assemblies– were many (financial crisis, housing crisis, high unemployment and highest youth unemployment, corruption, sense of lack of political legitimacy of democratic institutions, etc.), one of the most clear demands was the improvement of democratic processes and institutions, especially by increasing transparency, accountability and participation – all of them now much realizable by means of ICTs. Issues like direct democracy, deliberative democracy and liquid democracy were intensively brought to the public agenda, oftentimes by using prototypes to use public open data, building ICT-assisted decision-making platforms or by whistle-blowing against corruption by making arcane information publicly available and understandable (Calvo et al., 2011; Castells, 2012; Holmberg, 2012).

In the short term, the 15M had little effect. It slightly affected the municipal elections of May 2011 (Anduiza et al., 2012), among other things because of the nearness of the events. Some effects were the increase of null and blank votes, and the clear shift of votes from the two major parties to minority/alternative ones. Notwithstanding, it did especially contribute to articulate and strengthen that network of citizens who were being utterly active but outside of institutions and totally ignoring other organized civil society organizations such as NGOs and labor unions, not to speak of political parties.

Technopolitics and “network parties”

2013 saw the birth of the Citizen Network Party-X. A sort of reinvention of the Pirate Party (though with many differences) it provided intelligence and tools for the “party coming from the 15M”, Podemos, founded in 2014 to concur to the European Parliament elections in 2014, where it won 5 seats, and later on to concur (with different embodiments) to the municipal elections in May 2015, where it won, among others, the two major cities in Spain: Madrid and Barcelona.

The parties now in office in Madrid (Ahora Podemos) and Barcelona (Barcelona en Comú) are both a mixture of civic movement, civic platform and far-left party, one of their main goals being the same as that of the 15M Spanish Indignados Movement: to improve the transparency, accountability of the government, and to make of decisions a process as open, deliberative and participatory as possible. Another goal, more tacit than explicit, is to leverage the potential of technopolitics inside democratic institutions.

Madrid – in late 2015 – and Barcelona – in early 2016 – both engage in a participatory

process based in open source solution CONSUL¹, the web software initially developed by the City Council of Madrid to enable support its strategy for open government and e-participation, and that has later on been adopted by Barcelona or the Barcelona county for their own strategies – and joining the core software of developers to include new features and contribute to the general development of the project core.

While the former mostly focuses in particular proposals and participatory budgeting, the second one has been used as a supporting tool to draft the strategic plan of the city for 2016-2019. Notwithstanding, both city governments have ambitious plans so that the platforms become the axis of all decision making of the city, where the citizen will have a personal profile to propose, engage with and monitor all the activities, topics, etc. that they might be interested in.

And, one of the most important aspects: the evolution of both platforms has also been influenced by a constant dialogue between both cities. Leveraging on the fact that the platform is free, many other cities have shown interest in adapting both the technology and the philosophy and organizational architecture behind these two initiatives led by Madrid and Barcelona.

The institutionalization of technopolitics

It is interesting to note that, despite the relatively limited power that municipalities have in Spain, the existence of such a platform and, most importantly, the coordination of cities through the platform – planning, design, development, implementation, evaluation, escalation to supra-municipal structures (like country governments) is a direct – though implicit – challenge towards national sovereignty and an important devolution of sovereignty to both municipalities and the individual citizen.

It is important to note that these kind of political and structural developments change perceptions, roles, designs of institutions and, on the whole, represent crossing red lines that will become very difficult to re-draw.

On the other hand, the dialogue between institutions and citizens, through a specific technological design is extremely liquid, especially when (1) the platform is open source, (2) citizens have some flexibility in the way they use technology (see below), (3) there is a concurrence of other political actors such as other municipalities and (4) necessarily many governmental bodies will have to end up adapting to the requirements of the technology and the participatory processes – and not the other way round, as it is the norm².

The legal framework

Participation in Spain, as it will be detailed afterwards, has traditionally been scarce and

¹ <https://github.com/consul/consul>

² As it will be shown below, the architecture of the technological platform includes many possibilities of participation (proposals, deliberation, supporting to proposals) that were initially in the hands of a pocketful of people, mainly political representatives, public servants and major lobbies). Putting the platform to work necessary implied the redesign of some procedures, including actual power shifts within the governmental bodies.

limited. One reason usually provided to explain this fact is what happened during the restoration of Democracy since the death of the dictator Francisco Franco to the approval of the Constitution of 1978. The II Republic of Spain (1931-1939) has been acknowledged to be chaotic in political terms, a chaos that somehow sparked the uprising of the military against the legitimate government to establish “law and order”.

When the dictator died there was a huge consensus that the state needed strong institutions so to avoid the chaos of the II Republic and, thus, disincentive that a coup d'état could happen again, at least on the same grounds as Franco's.

The Spanish Constitution of 1978, and following laws – like the Ley Orgánica 5/1985, de 19 de junio, del Régimen Electoral General (LOREG)³ – is designed in a way that gives strong powers to democratic institutions –the Parliament, political parties, labour unions, etc.– and aims at funnelling most civil participation within institutions. These institutions have often been labelled as being black boxes whose functioning is only known and mastered from people inside, and having only few ways to contribute or interact with them.

The Internet and the 15M Spanish Indignados Movement –among other reasons– challenged the status quo established by the Spanish Constitution of 1978.

The coming of age of the institutional use of the Internet in governance in Spain has two clear milestones.

On the one hand, the [*Ley 34/2002, de 11 de julio, de servicios de la sociedad de la información y de comercio electrónico*](#)⁴ (LSSI) of July 2002 set the foundations of the main operations in the Internet, providing legal coverage for information, communications and transactions on the Internet. This law was followed by the [*Ley 56/2007, de 28 de diciembre, de Medidas de Impulso de la Sociedad de la Información*](#)⁵ of December 2007 which, with the aim to foster the Government's strategic plan for 2006-2010 set some rules to frame and define crucial concepts such as e-invoicing, digital identities (including corporate ones), adaption of other preceding laws, etc.

In terms of Government, and besides the Ley 56/2007, the [*Ley 11/2007, de 22 de junio, de acceso electrónico de los ciudadanos a los Servicios Públicos*](#)⁶ (LAECSP) became a major turning point in the way the Administration looked at the Internet – and at its relationship with the citizen, now also mediated by the Internet. In general terms, the LAECSP initiated a long and deep transformation in the Spanish administration at all levels, from the state and central government to the municipalities.

If the first laws – *Ley 24/2002*, *Ley 56/2007* and some others – especially regulated the infrastructures and the actors using them, the *Ley 56/2007* and some other regulations that came after it set the basis of what governments can or must do on the Internet, and

³ Law of general electoral regime, that regulates legislative and municipal elections, and is the backbone for regional elections.

⁴ Law on the services of the Information Society and e-commerce, regulating all digital services and transactions, public and private.

⁵ Law on measures to foster the Information Society, as a roadmap to contribute to the development and uptake of digital content and services.

⁶ Law on electronic access to public services by citizens, or e-government.

what citizens – as such – can or must do, especially in their interactions with different levels of government. The object and content of these laws, though, is mostly technical or procedural: more than granting rights to citizens, in the sense of liberties, establish some duties for public administrations to go online in their provision of public services. On the other hand, they set the guarantees for citizens when they act both as customers or as receivers of public services.

As time passed, it became obvious that the law from 2007 was falling short: as the citizen scaled up the “ladder of participation” (Arnstein, 1969), administrative transactions demanded an extension in both ends of the ladder: on one end, they demanded more active interaction, more initiative, more participation; on the other end, they demanded more evidence, more accountability, more information. The outdatedness of the law became even more evident with the rampant cases of corruption that had been emerging in the latest years⁷, the demands for more and better democracy during the first decade of the 2000s and most especially after the 15th May 2011 *Indignados* Movement, the appearance of whistleblowers or the growing evidence that information, if with digital support, could be distributed at a much lower marginal cost than in the past and, thus, the main reason for the closure of public information was quickly vanishing.

The [*Ley 19/2013, de 9 de diciembre, de Transparencia, Acceso a la Información Pública y Buen Gobierno*](#)⁸ was an answer to that and to fix the fact that Spain was one of the few Western democracies not to have a law on transparency and access to public information. The Law, nevertheless, was ambiguous and left plenty of room for arbitrariness from the government and, in many senses, it was born old, as it did not leverage the full potential of the digital revolution both in terms of information and communication (Peña-López, 2012, 2013a, 2015).

The Catalan [*Llei 19/2014, del 29 de desembre, de transparència, accés a la informació pública i bon govern*](#)⁹ was enacted as the regional version of the Spanish Transparency Law. Slightly improved in some key aspects, it translated, though, in a quite similar law with no paradigmatic changes (Peña-López, 2014a, 2014b).

Some months before, in September 2014, the Catalan Parliament passed the [*Llei 10/2014, del 26 de setembre, de consultes populars no referendàries i d'altres formes de participació ciutadana*](#)¹⁰ to regulate citizen participation. As it had happened with the Spanish Transparency Law, that was replicated or adapted in many other levels of government (regional or even local), participation became very popular during the second decade of the 2000s and many Spanish regions and municipalities saw their own participation regulations passed – unlike the Spanish central Government, which never passed such a law. The Catalan law, unlike similar ones, is quite ambitious and provides a very open framework not only for citizens to be asked for their opinions, but for the civil society to organize, make proposals, and participate in public decision-making.

⁷ As it has been said, the several laws only took into account technical issues and matters of digitization of public services and e-commerce. Corruption, among other issues, raised awareness on the need to regulate this issues, now in the framework of the Information Society.

⁸ Law on transparency, access to public information and good government.

⁹ Law on transparency, access to public information and good government (here in Catalan).

¹⁰ Law on citizen non-binding enquiries and other forms of citizen participation.

Some of the later deployments of e-participation in many cities, among others Barcelona, can be framed within this law, especially when it comes to consultations binding decisions. Another one of the reasons behind such an advanced law is only evident to the locals: that the law could be the legal framework of an eventual process of independence of Catalonia from Spain.

As for the specific case of the City of Barcelona, the [*Carta municipal de Barcelona*¹¹](#) and the *Normes reguladores de la participaci3n ciutadana* (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2002) both regulate how citizens can participate.

This scenario is clearly suboptimal¹²: most of the efforts were put in updating technology and procedures to catch up with the digital revolution, while the most important challenges on corruption and transparency, participation and consultation, and others only received minor attention and very shy laws – ranked among the least ambitious ones in the OECD. But, on the other hand, they contributed to create quite a sensitive scenario that notwithstanding witnessed a significant leap backwards in March 2015, when the Spanish [*Ley Org3nica 4/2015, de 30 de marzo, de protecci3n de la seguridad ciudadana*](#)¹³ was passed. Aimed at fighting against terrorism and “restoring order” in social networking sites, the law – nicknamed the “Gag law” – was seen by many as a serious cut in civil rights, especially freedom of speech and political freedoms.

These laws enabled the flourishing of a variety of e-government websites, transparency portals, open data portals and even some open government portals, along with the promotion of “politics 2.0” among elected representatives and higher rank officials who gradually entered social networking sites.

From e-Readiness to e-Participation

Spain has usually been a “digital striver” in terms of e-readiness, occupying lower positions in e-readiness rankings of the highest income economies (Peña-L3pez, 2009). According to the Web Foundation’s Web Index, Spanish has always been raking below the 20th position.

As the World Economic Forum’s Networked Readiness Index shows (Figure 1) the overall digital performance is not very low, but the economic and political frameworks usually drag the country downwards in the global ranking. As it is shown below, the indicators under the readiness subindex perform quite well, including what concerns individual usage. That is, technology is not bad in the country and people do use it intensively. But the political and regulatory environment, business usage or the economic impact are very low, while government usage and social impact only barely higher. Among other reasons, the chronic bad health of Spanish economy due to delayed institutional reforms, and the faulty privatization of the incumbent telecommunications operator that has produced an imperfect competition in the connectivity market – are two of the main aspects pointed out by experts to explain why the Spanish digital economy has had a hard time taking off.

¹¹ Barcelona local charter.

¹² See next section.

¹³ Law on the protection of civil security.



Figure 1: Spain in the Network Readiness Index 2016. Source: WEF

These data are opposite with what happens in the public sector, where Spain has made big efforts not to lag behind digital leaders in terms of public e-readiness and e-government. So, the relative slow development of the digital economy cannot compare with the strong advancement of the digital government.

As UNPAN shows (see Figure 2 and Figure 3) the efforts have had very good results both in terms of absolute values (as measured by e-government and e-participation indices) as in terms of relative position in the global ranking.

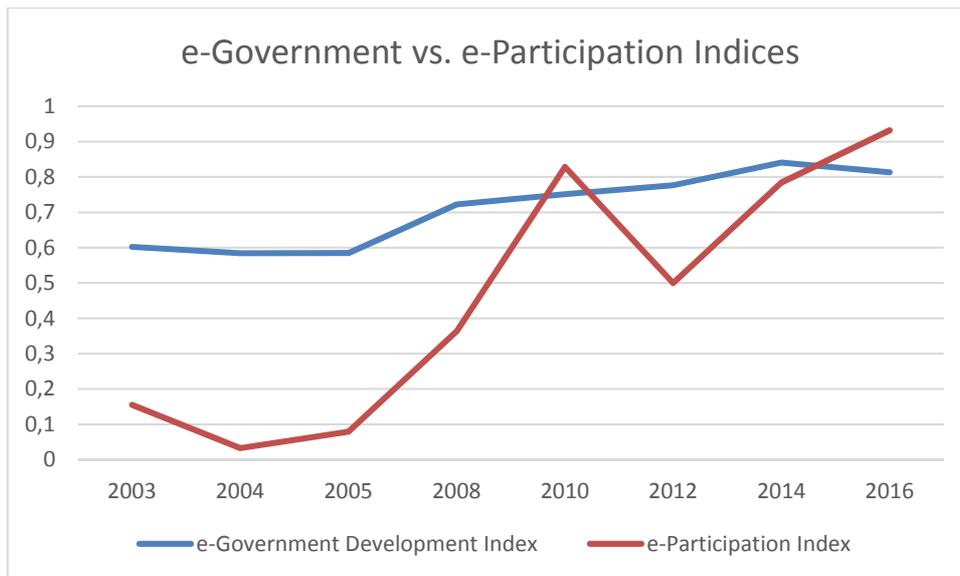


Figure 2: e-Government and e-Participation indices. Data: UNPAN

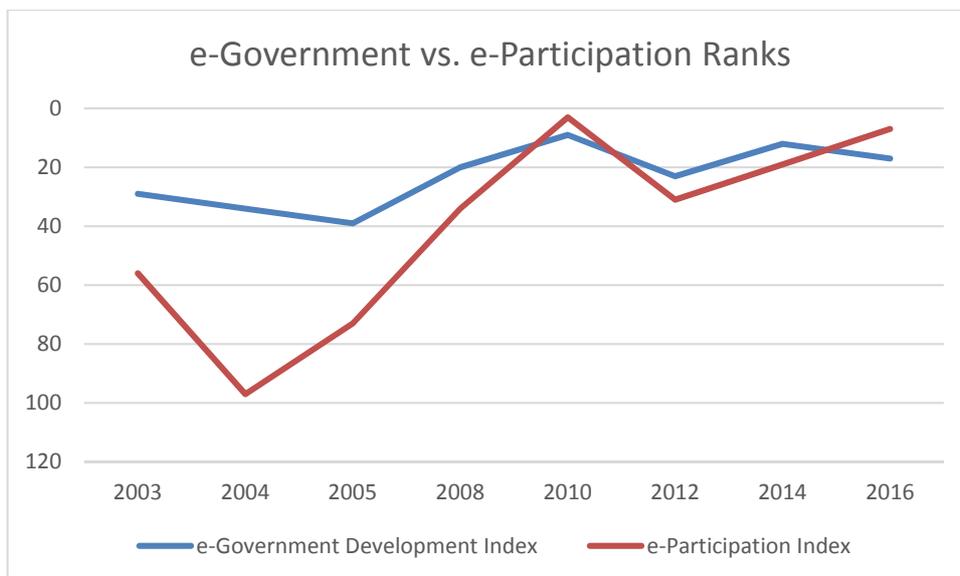


Figure 3: e-Government and e-Participation ranks. Data: UNPAN

The whole scenario looks optimistic for ICT-mediated participation: e-readiness levels, while with room for improvement, are more than enough for most, if not all, government-led and citizen-led participation initiatives. Despite the fact that the digital divide still is an inhibitor for some citizens, it is a fact that the infrastructures are in place, citizens are using ICTs and the Government has deployed a big potential for both the delivery of services and the interaction with the citizen. Thus, the arena is quite set for upcoming complex participation to take place in the nearer future.

But although participation is generally – and increasingly – agreed to be a good thing, the reality is that it still belongs to an industrial era: participation is almost exclusively institution-led and discrete, in the sense that there is not a continuum of participation but just isolated initiatives where the citizen is generally listened to (Peña-López, 2011a).

The literature shows that the crisis of participation and representation is pushing citizens outside of institutional politics (Fuster & Subirats, 2012) and into new kinds of organizations (Peña-López, et al., 2014; Espelt et al., 2016) which are strong in digital and social media (Sádaba, 2012) but where they do not seem to be able to establish a dialogue with the institutions of representative democracy in order to, for instance, perform that needed and asked for reform of the aforementioned institutions (Font et al., 2012).

According to the Worldwide Governance Indicators (Figure 4), Spain’s data for voice and accountability have only worsened in the last decade. This is coherent with what has been said before: despite the big (and successful) efforts, most of them have been put to create platforms and services to broadcast and give a voice... to the public sector, political parties and institutions in general, but in a unidirectional way which rarely listens back to the receivers.

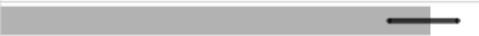
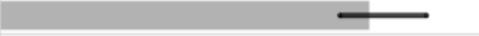
Indicator	Country	Year	Percentile Rank (0 to 100) 
Voice and Accountability	Spain	2004	
		2009	
		2014	

Figure 4: Voice and accountability in Spain. Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators

Two examples will illustrate this statement.

The first one is the [Consensus](#) platform. Run by Localret, a consortium of local governments in Catalonia, it provides a virtual space which municipalities can use to inform their citizens and to plan and operate e-participation initiatives. Quite successful where it is used, only 21 municipalities (out of the 948 existing in Catalonia, that is, 2.1% of the total) are active users of the platform. Barcelona is not among them.

The consortium behind Consensus, acknowledging the limitations of the platform for a broader concept of participation which includes deliberation, is now planning a major update of the platform based on the success of *Decide Madrid*¹⁴ and hand in hand with the team behind *decidim.barcelona*. This would turn the actual platform –centred in raising issues or asking for information or explanations to public representatives– into an agora where issues are not only raised but commented, enriched, debated or supported.

The second example is about citizen initiatives (in Spain, Iniciativas Legislativas Populares, ILP¹⁵). Mentioned in the Spanish Constitution (1978) and regulated since

¹⁴ Decide Madrid, as it will be shown below, is the initiative by the Madrid City Council to engage its citizens in the making of proposals and collectively shaping the strategic plan of the city for the whole political term. It includes the deployment of a brand new digital platform, released as free software and thus making it possible to not only freely use it but also modify it or improve it.

¹⁵ In Spain, only the government and the Congress can propose laws, which the Parliament (both Chambers) will have to pass. The Spanish constitution introduces the possibility that a collective of citizens can propose a law and submit it to the Congress for its approval. The

1984, only 142 initiatives have been submitted in more than 30 years, all of them but one rejected by the Spanish Parliament of unsuccessful in their procedure, as the required 500,000 signatures is an overwhelming barrier for most civic organizations.

So, in a nutshell, Spain is fully prepared, in terms of infrastructure and adoption, for ICT-mediated and deliberation-intensive participatory democracy, but its institutions clearly seem not to. As it has been said, the efforts to create a good technological and institutional environment are many.

The answer to the claims and demands for more information and transparency have been uneven and have been mostly focussed in the formal aspect of things: passing new laws and accomplishing the assessments of national and international watchdogs working in the field of transparency and accountability.

But beyond that, deliberation and co-decision have been most of the times not only been left aside, but been pulled back or even punished, as can be seen by the several sentences by the Constitutional Court, ruling against citizen initiatives or lower government levels' projects to enhance participation.

This is unparalleled with what is happening at the street level.

Since the March 11, 2004 terrorist attacks in Spain and the political demonstrations that followed them (Traficantes de Sueños, 2004), the country has been living a sort of political "transition" from the old order established in the 1978 Constitution (the one after the dictatorship of General Franco) in to a new order that is yet to fully catch on (Peña-López, 2013c).

The new technopolitical landscape (Kurban et al., 2016), put in to full throttle during the 15M Indignados Movement demonstrations in May 2011 and the following year (Alzazan et al., 2012; Holmberg, 2012 Toret et al., 2013) opened the promise of a new kind of politics (Presno Linera, 2014) that many label as a total change of paradigm (Jurado Gilabert, 2013; Batalla Adam, 2014) that directly challenges representative democracy and most of the institutions of today's liberal democracies.

This new era would be shifting from a democracy centred around institutions to another sort of technopolitical practices taking place in a network-based architecture of participation (Monterde, 2015)¹⁶. Of course there still is room for institutions, but with an organizational design most different than today's and much more like a social movement rather than the traditional institution.

The way to make this shift from a traditional institution towards a social movement-like institution (or political party) seems to be rooted in deliberation and an intensive use of ICTs (Borge & Santamarina Sáez, 2015; Haberer & Peña-López, 2016).

type of law that can be submitted, topic, geographical scope, etc. is determined by the 1984 Law. In general terms they usually require 500,000 signatures backing the proposal for the Congress to accept the submission.

¹⁶ Please refer to this work and Kurban et al., 2016, for a definition of technopolitics and an approach to net-parties and social movements in the Information age. About the hybridization of social movements and institutions, please see Peña-López et al, 2014.

And this is, precisely, what could just be happening in the city – and the city council – of Barcelona (Aragón et al., 2015).

Exploring ICT-mediated structures of citizen engagement

The institutional ICT-mediated participation context of decidim.barcelona

In the previous section we ended up stating that even if governments in Spain – at their respective levels – were quite advanced in using ICTs for information and broadcasting, it was organized civil society that was leading thorough ICT-mediated participation, based on intensive interaction, deliberation and, in some cases, making proposals and voting on them.

Thus, all three levels of government above the citizen of Barcelona have long been running their e-government portals¹⁷, their transparency portals¹⁸ and their open data portals¹⁹.

Besides the three levels of government to which Barcelona belongs to, there are several other initiatives –both at the Spanish national level or at the international level– that the City Council of Barcelona took in consideration before initiating their own participation project.

Thus, in the technical report that the City Council commissioned for the preparations of *dedicim.barcelona* (tecnopolitica.net, 2015b), the authors mention the cases of Icelandic Citizen Foundation's *Yourpriorities*; *Petitions* for the UK Government and Parliament; and *Open Ministry* tool for crowdsourcing legislation in Finland. At the Spanish level, two main government-led initiatives are analysed: *Ireki*, launched in 2010 by the Basque Government, arguably the open government pioneer in Spain; and *Decide Madrid*, since Fall 2015, for ICT-mediated participation in Madrid municipality.

The preceding two are utmost interesting initiatives but, as it has been said, practically exceptions in the Spanish landscape.

The case of Decide Madrid, though, deserves special attention. First of all, it is led by Ahora Madrid, a party in general terms similar to the one in office in Barcelona, in the sense that it aims at putting deliberation at the center of all political activity, as many other parties born in the aftermath of the Spanish *Indignados* Movement, just like Barcelona en Comú. Besides this political or ideological thrust, Decide Madrid was designed as an open source project in all its facets: its technology, to begin with, but

17 Spain: <http://administracion.gob.es/>

Catalonia: <http://web.gencat.cat/ca/tramits>

Barcelona: <https://w30.bcn.cat/APPS/portaltramits/portal/changeLanguage/default.html>

18 Spain: <http://transparencia.gob.es>

Catalonia: <http://transparencia.gencat.cat>

Barcelona: <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/transparencia/es>

19 Spain: <http://datos.gob.es/>

Catalonia: <http://dadesobertes.gencat.cat>

Barcelona: <http://opendata.bcn.cat/opendata/en>

also its political design, its communication procedures, the transparency of its results, etc. Decide Madrid opened a Pandora's box of a new kind of ICT-mediated participation and paved the path for Barcelona .

The civic-led ICT-mediated participation context of decidim.barcelona

If the institutional arena is poor with cases of ICT-mediated participation, the civil society has been much more fertile, especially after the events of May 2011²⁰.

Of the many civic-led initiatives in ICT-mediated participation in Spain, at least three groups of them deserve being mentioned for their importance in the deployment of events and initiatives that came after them.

First of all, the group of initiatives, platforms and tools in general that were designed, hacked or adapted to organize the information and communication during the May 15, 2011 Movement. The movement used almost everything that was at hand, from blogs and social networking sites (such as Twitter and Facebook) to other tools that had not been much used in these scenarios, like wikis and virtual text pads (such as Titanpad, among others). Besides these standard tools, the movement adapted other tools to create their own communication ecosystem:

- Lorea an alternative social networking site [N-I](#), to become a substitute of commercial social networking sites as Facebook;
- Questions2Answers for the proposition platform [Propongo](#), used to propose ideas, debate them and try and reach consensus on them;
- or the newest [Nabú](#), for the management of cooperatives and assemblies in general with the aim to write consensus documents (Haberer, 2016).

The second one is [Fundación Ciudadana Civio](#), which was born in Fall 2011 as a civic answer to the tremendous demand for transparency and accountability for government and elected representatives. Since its creation, Civio has arguably led the debate of transparency in Spain through action: either by creating tools for transparency and accountability, or by exploiting open data sets to produce data visualizations and raise awareness on specific issues or, probably the most important aspect of Civio's activity, by encouraging, guiding and helping governments (local and regional) to adapt some of Civio's tools and turn them into open government portals.

Both groups of initiatives – the ones emerging in distributed ways after 15 May 2011, or the more institutional Fundación Ciudadana Civio – pushed some political parties and leaders to embrace deliberation and transparency for their own organizations. Thus, Podemos – the political party that was founded in March 2014 leveraging the momentum of the Spanish *Indignados* – used many tools to constitute itself and write the first versions of its vision, mission and programme. Platforms like Agora Voting, Loomio or Reddit were used to make proposals, to write and comment programmes, to prioritise proposals or, in general, to create communities of interest around topics that clustered around the idea of a new party.

In the case of Barcelona, Barcelona en Comú also used some of these tools, including

20 For an incomplete but inspiring list of citizen democracy initiatives please see http://ictlog.net/wiki/index.php?title=Citizen_democracy_initiatives_in_Spain

DemocracyOS, to perform similar exercises of deliberation and political programme design.

The case of Barcelona PAM 2012-2015

Besides the institutional and civic context of e-participation, *decidim.barcelona* had had yet another example in its own history: the PAM 2012-2015, the strategic plan of the municipality (in the Catalan acronym for *pla d'actuació municipal*) for the previous term.

The PAM 2012-2015 was already ambitious and honest for its time and especially in comparison with other major cities. It used intensively ICTs both for informing the citizens and for gathering their opinion and was quite successful according to the data available (tecnopolítica.net, 2015a).

Indeed, almost one third of the total citizen contributions to the PAM 2012-2015 were done by individual citizens through virtual platforms, mostly the official website with just some other contributions through social networking sites.

As it will be seen in the last section, though, both the design and the patterns of participation were quite different from what *decidim.barcelona* implied for the makings of the PAM 2016-2019.

It is important to highlight, though, that the citizens of Barcelona had already had an interesting and successful experience in e-participation at the highest level – the municipality strategic plan for – which was not only boosted by the events of 2011, but also by a serious commitment of the City Council to emphasize participation in city planning and government-citizen relationships.

The strategic vision behind decidim.barcelona e-participation

The City Council of Barcelona clearly states (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015) what are the goals of the participative process that will have *decidim.barcelona* as its central space:

1. To elaborate the PAM and the PAD (the strategic plan of the municipality and the districts, respectively) for 2016-2019 with the active participation of the citizenry, in an open, transparent and networked fashion.
2. To give a leading voice to the citizenry of Barcelona.
3. To give a voice to the neighbourhoods of the city so that the city becomes the city of the neighbourhoods and takes their voice into account when it comes to city planning.
4. To collect proposals that come from plural and diverse opinions and interests.
5. To foster the participation of least active collectives or collectives with more difficulties.
6. To foster a culture of active participation, of collective construction of the government of the city and citizen democracy.
7. To strengthen the foundations for future processes of citizen participation.

These goals go totally in line with the ethos of the Spanish *Indignados* Movement and

all the demands for more and better democracy in Spain, and which was the central philosophy of the political parties that, like Ahora Madrid in Madrid and Barcelona en Comú in Barcelona, went in office in the Spanish local elections of 2015.

There are three aspects which are worth highlighting still in the field of the vision behind *decidim.barcelona*.

The first one is the stress in “providing tools that work for the democratic debate” (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015). This statement is twice interesting. On the one hand because it puts the democratic debate, deliberation, in the centre of the project. That is, it is not making proposals what counts, but deliberation. This is quite different, for instance, from what Barcelona did in its PAM 2012-2015, and it is different from the Basque Country’s experience with Irekia. On the other hand the technological and procedural factor is explicitly mentioned under “tools”. That is, the provision of tools (digital platforms, events, facilitation by experts, knowledge management tools, etc.) becomes a major concern in order to promote deliberation.

This concern for tools is deeply connected with, second point, the aim to foster “self-organization, autonomy and empowerment of the citizen” (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015). And this concern is a game changer in politics in general and in politics in Spain in particular, where institutions have traditionally been very eager to keep power for themselves.

And third, all this process will happen looking for a “transversal participation of people and interests” and “participation in common spaces and networks”. In other words, the project will foster community building on the one hand, but trying not to damage – on the contrary – the already existing social capital, both in the form of associations or organizations, or in the form of reputed experts which can have a qualitative participation if duly approached.

The structure of the whole process in three phases (Figure 5) aims at making this possible: phase 1 will prioritize traditional bodies for participation and the voice of institutions and organizations; phase 2 will be open to citizen participation; and phase 3 will collect all the proposals, work on them and present a final document to be approved by the plenary of the City Council.

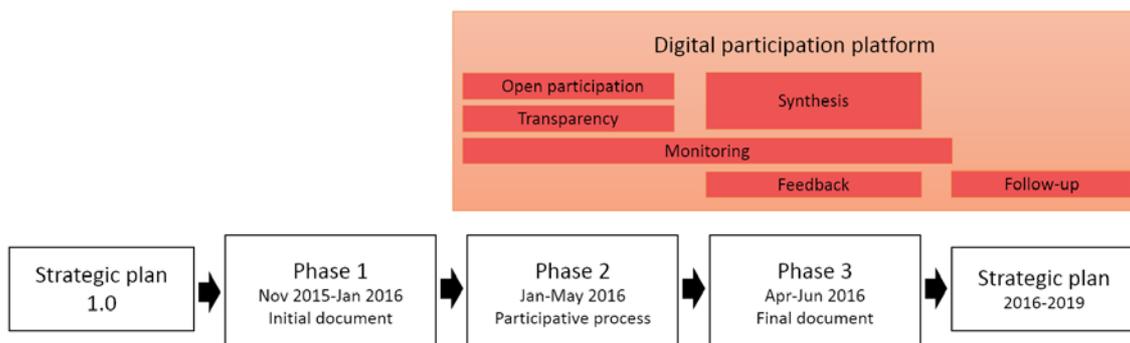


Figure 5: Flowchart of the participative process in *decidim.barcelona*.

Source: Ajuntament de Barcelona (2015).

These three phases allow for a process that is:

- Traceable, so that its complete footprint can be drawn and made public in real time.
- Built collectively, by all the possible actors in the city who can participate from/in many different and multiple places.
- Transparent, not only in terms of its final outputs – achieved through traceability – but also in the tools that concur in it: it is an open source project, from the technological tools to the procedures applied in each phase.
- Committed to the citizen and which provides feedback to all the participants.

To spark the debate, the City Council produced a first document to centre the debate and the plan to discuss it at least in 50 topic-related events and 200 district-centred events²¹.

To enable the discussion and deliberation around the PAM, two main devices were created: the PAM-PAD Office and the *decidim.barcelona* platform.

The aim of the PAM-PAD Office was to support the whole process and to host a technical commission to accompany the process. This commission is made up by a referent from each district and one from each thematic area from the City Council, its main goal being the design of spaces of participation, coordination and monitoring of the whole process. Besides the office and the commission, a professional team of facilitators was created in order to make the best of the interactions with the citizens and deliberation sessions.

The *decidim.barcelona* platform, at its turn, would over all, become the central piece of the whole knowledge management system: everything in the participation process would begin and end in the digital platform. Besides holding all the proposals that the institutions, organizations or individual citizens would make, the platform also enables making new proposals²², sharing them with other citizens, debating them and providing arguments in favour or against a given proposal, explicitly support them (as if in a tacit referendum), to be informed of the time and place of face-to-face events or, of course, to monitor one's own proposals and see their evolution along the process.

Norms informing decidim.barcelona e-participation

Most, if not all, the norms informing the participation process are much explicit, in coherence with the context around *decidim.barcelona*, the ethos of the social movements that held up the political parties that emerged from them, and the political programme of Barcelona en Comú, the party in office in the City Council of Barcelona. Quality democracy, transparency, citizen participation, deliberation. These are the norms and behind and in the forefront of the participation process.

The top priority is the total traceability of the process as a system and of each and every

²¹ As it will be discussed afterwards, these figures ended up being quite higher.

²² Proposals can be submitted directly into the website, or be made at a face-to-face event, agreed upon and then a representative of the collective or a reporter will upload it to the website.

proposal as the basic piece of the system. Everyone, every citizen, knows at any given time what is the state of their proposal, which can be in one of the following stages:

1. Proposal just submitted.
2. Technical acceptance, that is, the proposal is feasible, both in technical as in legal terms.
3. Political acceptance, that is, the proposal fits into the general priorities established for the PAM 2016-2019.
4. Inclusion into the PAM, or, in other words, translation of the proposal into an action – which can be made up by a single proposal or similar or complementary ones.

Both the personal dashboard of the citizen or the proposal browser of the platform provide detailed information about this.

Besides traceability of the proposals, there also is total transparency on how the process works and what is the actual stage of the process.

Last, but not least, participation is fully open: any citizen of Barcelona can participate. Indeed, participation is extended to any individual in the world. In order to increase deliberation, non-citizens can participate in the debates and submit new proposals, the only different with denizens being that the latter can support proposals (i.e. vote for them). Which is completely coherent: the deliberation is richer as more people gather for a debate, but only denizens can really vote or prioritise the proposals that will eventually become actions and be put into practice.

The concern that people might be excluded from participation if it totally shifted towards a digital platform is explicitly addressed by *decidim.barcelona*. It is explicitly stated that the platform is *not* the one-stop-shop for participation, but the tool to manage knowledge, the back-office of the project, which can have a digital or a face-to-face “front end”. Indeed, the online vs. offline dichotomy is directly addressed and eliminated by planning different information entry points, as different points of knowledge dissemination and deliberation.

What matters is the uniqueness of information and the creation of the “participative citizen” profile, with unique criteria for measuring and taking into account participation, regardless of whether the participation was online or offline, or made individually or through a collective.

Impact of decidim.barcelona in participation: activity, actors and new actors

It is very soon to assess in depth the impact of *decidim.barcelona* – the project began in February 2016 and closed the participatory phase in April 2016. But the available data already provide some evidence on two aspects: the quantitative changes in participation and some shifts and qualitative changes both at the expectations level as in some actual realizations.

We have already said that the project benefited from the momentum of the Spanish *Indignados* Movement and the hope that many put in the new parties that emerged from it.

Only at the participant level there is 150% increase in the number of citizens that took

part in the different deliberations and by submitting proposals. If 26.989 citizens took part in the PAM 2012-2015, more than 42,000²³ did it in the PAM 2016-2019.

The number of proposals, though, went from 17.751 in 2012 to 10,859 in 2016, which is a decrease of almost 40% - and even higher if we consider the increase of participants. But the devil is in the details: in 2012, if we leave aside communal events and organizations, individual participation was unidirectional and most people submitted a preconfigured ballot in which they would explain their proposal. Thus, there was no debate, no deliberation, no comments, no supports at all from their peers. We believe that the possibility to have real debates, with the ability actually see what other citizens submitted, to comment on others' proposals, to highlight the pros and cons of every proposal and even support it has enriched the debate thus promoting less proposals but better defined and usually supported by several citizens. In rough numbers, there were 165,087 proposal supports, 18,191 comments and 13,210 comment supports. In total, the organization counts up to 220,000 interactions, adding face-to-face and digital interactions including proposals, comments, debates, supports, votes and face-to-face interventions.

And this is sure a big change in the game of participation: how deliberation decreases dispersion and, at the same time, increases the likelihood that proposals are better in quality.

Arguably because of the quality of the proposals, but even more likely because of the commitment of the City Council, 70% of the proposals have been accepted to be part of the strategic plan of the municipality under 1,467 strategic actions. It is worth mentioning that 1,300 proposals came from the City Council itself and its electoral programme which, by the way, was also created in a collaborative way.

One of the aspects that raised more concern was how to avoid a crowding out effect, where individual (digital) participation could replace institutionalized participation through civic society organizations. To avoid this, 412 face-to-face events were organized. These events added up 13,614 participations which represented 43% of all participation in the process – being the remaining 57% in the digital platform. Thus, the centralization of the management – but not the activity in the digital platform – was totally compatible with an important role for civic organizations, while nevertheless fostering individual empowerment.

This aspect, though, did have a change in relationship with 2012, where the share was just the opposite: in the previous participation process, 56% of the participation was channelled through civic organizations or institutionalized events. On the contrary, only 38% of the citizens did it by using the ballot and the several ways (website, social networking sites, paper) through which it could be submitted. Notwithstanding, the number of proposals coming from individuals rose to 60%. That is, more people participated through associations, but more proposals came from individuals.

The latter is coherent with the findings in the new process: organized deliberation leads to less proposals, but quite probably better defined and with much more support than

²³ This is the most accurate figure published so far. Some other sources elevate it to almost 47,000, though they may include organizations, whose figure is circa 1,700.

punctual participation.

Last, but not least, there was the danger that centralizing participation would be in favour of “city proposals” and in detriment of “district proposals”. In the end, 42% of the proposals were at the city level, while the remaining 58% were at the district level. Again, having worked (a) face-to-face and (b) with organizations (which could work face-to-face or virtually) most probably had a positive impact in a proper balance between the city level and the district level.

Design and embedded law in decidim.barcelona

There are three key points in the design of *decidim.barcelona* that most likely have an impact both in the results as in the kind of participation that happened during the participatory process:

- Access and information is participation.
- Transparency by design.
- Deliberation by design.

We have long talked about how access to different participation environments and spaces has been curated all along the process, including exhaustive information both about the process and the topics for deliberation.

As it has been said, any person in the world could be part of the process by participating in debates or submitting new proposals. Only supporting them was reserved to Barcelona denizens.

Information was omnipresent, to begin with the Municipality Plan (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2016a) that was prepared to frame the deliberation and participation process. Of course, all the participants could access all the proposals that the City Council had already prepared or the proposals submitted by their own peers. These proposals could be browsed and filtered in many ways to ease accessing the relevant information for the citizen and creating a better signal/noise ratio.

This aspect leads to transparency. As it has been mentioned, all the procedures – including the source code of the platform – were totally accessible for inspection by any citizen. All dates and venues for face-to-face gatherings were also known in advance. And, of course, the state of each and every proposal submitted.

Last, deliberation was so hard-coded in the design of the platform – and the design of the events, which copied the platform’s design – that it was almost unavoidable. Besides submitting proposals, commenting and supporting both proposals and comments was easy and quite an invitation from the way the platform and the events were designed. Sharing proposals in social networking sites helped them to be disseminated and to some ideas to attract peer citizens and gain momentum.

There is a “meta” element to be taken into consideration here, and an element that most probably will be of key importance in the future: the comparison with other participatory initiatives taking place, especially *Decide Madrid*.

We have already commented a sort of “brotherhood” between cities whose parties in

office come from the wave of indignation that put Spaniards on the streets in May 2011. This brotherhood operates at two levels: first, in the sense of being companions in a shared way; second, in a sort of friendly “competition” to see what movement or party comes out with the best idea and how others can copy, adapt and/or implement it. This has happened between Madrid and Barcelona and is already happening with Barcelona and many other Catalan cities.

In this case, what we are surely seeing and will surely see in the future is that governments will be “captive” of their own participatory designs. In other words, the designs are so open and the participation processes are so open that is very unlikely that the very proponents of these initiatives will be able to step back into traditional politics. This is a surrender that is totally wanted, but that is quite bold, especially when the institutional context in Spain and in Western democracies in general goes against this trend.

Inclusion and exclusion from participation in decidim.barcelona

Although it has been already made clear that access could be done in multiple ways (individually, collectively; with or without organizations and institutions) and places (digitally or in face-to-face events), it is worth stressing the fact that the City Council made strong efforts to avoid any kind of imbalance in access and in quality participation due to any kind of the usual vectors of exclusion.

Summing up, the digital platform was the central knowledge management back-office, but not the only entry point. The 410 face-to-face events allowed citizens, social agents and associations to access information, discuss it, make proposals, comment on them, support them and diffuse them. Events were created by topic and distributed geographically, so a given topic could be discussed at a given district by any given group or individual.

In addition to face-to-face events and the digital platform, “the charts” of the Municipal Plan were put on the streets to enable even more participation. The charts were mobile participation points that each district had at their disposal to complement the aforementioned spaces. The charts did a total of 265 routes.

On the other hand, the City Council campaigned hard to foster participation. There were, besides traditional news and diffusion outlets, 69 communication campaigns in social networking sites and 5 online debates with the representatives of the City Council.

In the end, around 1,700 organizations took place in the participation process, usually accompanied by the facilitators of the process office. The role of the organizations and the facilitators was crucial to avoid exclusion due to digital access or skills, or other factors just lack of time or low interest in politics, to name a few. The results of this combination of actors and initiatives can be consulted above.

Observing the shifts in meaning, norms and power in state-citizen engagement

The citizen in the leading role of policy-making and the new structures around them

The big change of paradigm in *decidim.barcelona*, as in other initiatives related with the social movements in 2011 and after, is that the citizen should have a leading role in policy-making. And *decidim.barcelona* is a clear and committed step forward in this attempt of devolution of sovereignty from institutions to citizens.

Many have criticized the different movements that, since the end of the XXth century, have made a call to the “power of the people”, labelling them as populism (Mayorga, 1997). Of course, there is a possibility that some new movements have a populist bias, or even a populist end.

But in this aim to promote citizens having their say the point of departure is not the common ground of populism, but yet a different one. Indeed, the ethos behind this putting the citizen in the centre is the ethos of the Information Age as described by Himanen (2003), and which heavily relies in the ethics of hackers (Levy, 1984) and the way that collective production has been working in a distributed way since the digital revolution (Raymond, 1999).

This new ethos is what leads the transformation of social production (Benkler, 2006), also in the political arena, where centralization and planning can lead to the metaphor of the blank paper as a horizontal and more democratic approach to decision-making. Or, digitally speaking, to wiki government (Noveck, 2009).

Although populism might perfectly be the outcome of such an approach – a failed outcome, of course – the logic behind these new ICT-mediated participation initiatives is the “logic of connective action” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) that would constitute the next level of politics: technopolitics (Kurban et al., 2016).

Under this new paradigm, intermediation or representation is not necessarily good – though it neither is necessarily bad: the goal is to unfold new participation spaces, deploy new participation mechanisms. And the main goal for this unfolding and deploying is not participation per se, or contenting the citizen – which would be the populist roadmap – but to leverage the power of the multitudes, the “wisdom of crowds” (Surowiecki, 2004), to improve the diagnosis – one of the most important stages of decision-making – through deliberation. In other words, to make an excellent exercise of naming and framing (Kettering Foundation, 2011) that will both legitimize the process and reduce the management of conflict once the decision is made.

Of course, shifting the subject that lies in the middle of the democratic process from the institution to the citizen comes with a price: the price of seeing new structures emerge and to see them compete or live along with the pre-existing order.

What we are thus witnessing goes in three different complementary ways.

First, as it has been said, in an increase of individual participation that comes from emancipation and empowerment.

Second, with the conformation of new, flexible, ad-hoc networks and collectives where membership is liquid in the sense that it comes from an utilitarian approach: the organization is a tool, not a way to define one's identity or to socialize. Ad-hoc networks and ad-hoc collectives form around a project on an idea and dissolve once the project or idea has been completed or been adopted by a bigger project or collective.

Third, with the strengthening of traditional organizations that, nevertheless, have to transform and adapt to the new reality. There is an apparent contradiction or a paradox in the former statement. It would seem that individual action and liquid membership in organizations and lobbies would weaken traditional organizations and institutions. But what we see in *decidim.barcelona* – and most probably because of its design to nurture social capital whatever its form – is that participation empowers not only individuals but organizations. Or, in other words, that individual participation and representative participation are complementary and not competitive.

But it is also true that as the means of participation are new, and benefit individual empowerment, organizations have to adapt to this new reality: they have to communicate and coordinate and address their members in new ways, as they have to relate to other organizations in also new ways (Vilaregut Sáez et al., 2015; Peña-López et al., 2013).

The dangers of technocentrism: digerati, goverati or new participative citizens?

Of course, not only can fostering individual participation and citizen empowerment damage the social tissue and harm pre-existing traditional civic organizations. It can, of course, privilege a certain segment of the population by privileging online participation, and end up creating a new elite of *digerati* and/or *goverati* (Peña-López, 2011b).

barcelona.decidim has made a decisive movement towards equalling online and offline participation, and towards shifting the core of the project into virtuality. But, as it has been said, this centralizing of everything online is a matter of digitization so that knowledge management is better performed, absolutely comprehensive and totally transparent and accessible.

But this knowledge management is without detriment of the entry points, which are kept multiple and adapted to the different profiles and needs of the citizen. The design of the participatory process is such that no one is left behind, that it is guaranteed that everyone can and will participate. Face-to-face events or events and profiles for organizations go in this precise direction.

Figure 6 shows the origin of the proposals (10,859) and their destiny in the final strategic actions (1,467) grouped by theme (including the non-approved proposals). The figure tells two different stories.

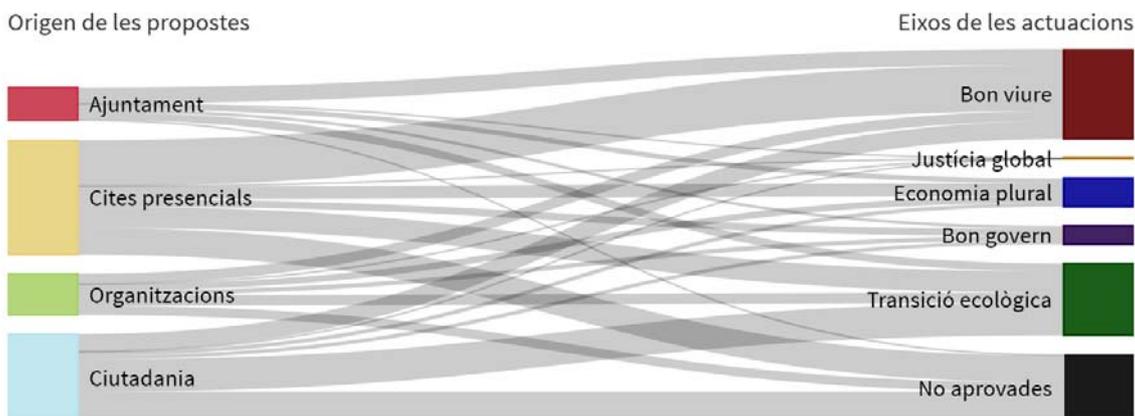


Figure 6.: Origin of the proposals and thematic actions. Source: Ajuntament de Barcelona²⁴.

Left, origin of the proposals: City Council, face-to-face events, civic organizations, individuals.

Right, thematic actions: wellbeing, global justice, plural economy, good government, ecologic transition, non-approved.

On the one hand, how the difficult balance between online and offline participation was successfully achieved. By looking at the picture – and the data behind – it does not seem that the digital divide (which is real in Barcelona, especially a third level digital divide²⁵) affected neither participation nor the final output of the participatory process.

On the other hand, there also is a balance between individual participation and collective participation, including in the latter institutional participation, civic organizations participation and participation in live face-to-face events.

There are, though, two more stories to be told after Figure 6.

The first one is even if balances in the kind of participation – online vs. offline, individual vs. collective – were successfully achieved, it is also true that the citizenry entering direct participation is a direct thread to pre-existing ways of collective participation, be them civil society organizations be them local assemblies or similar gatherings. Thus, even if it is true that organizations and institutions still had an important role, the fact that individuals could participate and their proposals be included in the action plans also means that ICT-mediation definitely ends the monopoly of institutions, civic organizations and, most especially, political and local leaders behind them respectively. And this is an absolute game-changer.

And it represents a game-changer not only because participation changes the structures of power, but also because both the mechanisms of participation and the outcomes change too.

²⁴ The source of the data visualizations in this section was accessed in August 1st, 2016 at <https://decidim.barcelona/dataviz/>

²⁵ See, among others, Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Hargittai. & Hsieh, 2012; Van Deursen & van Dijk, 2013; Van Deursen & van Dijk, 2016; Helsper et al., 2015; Helsper et al., 2016.

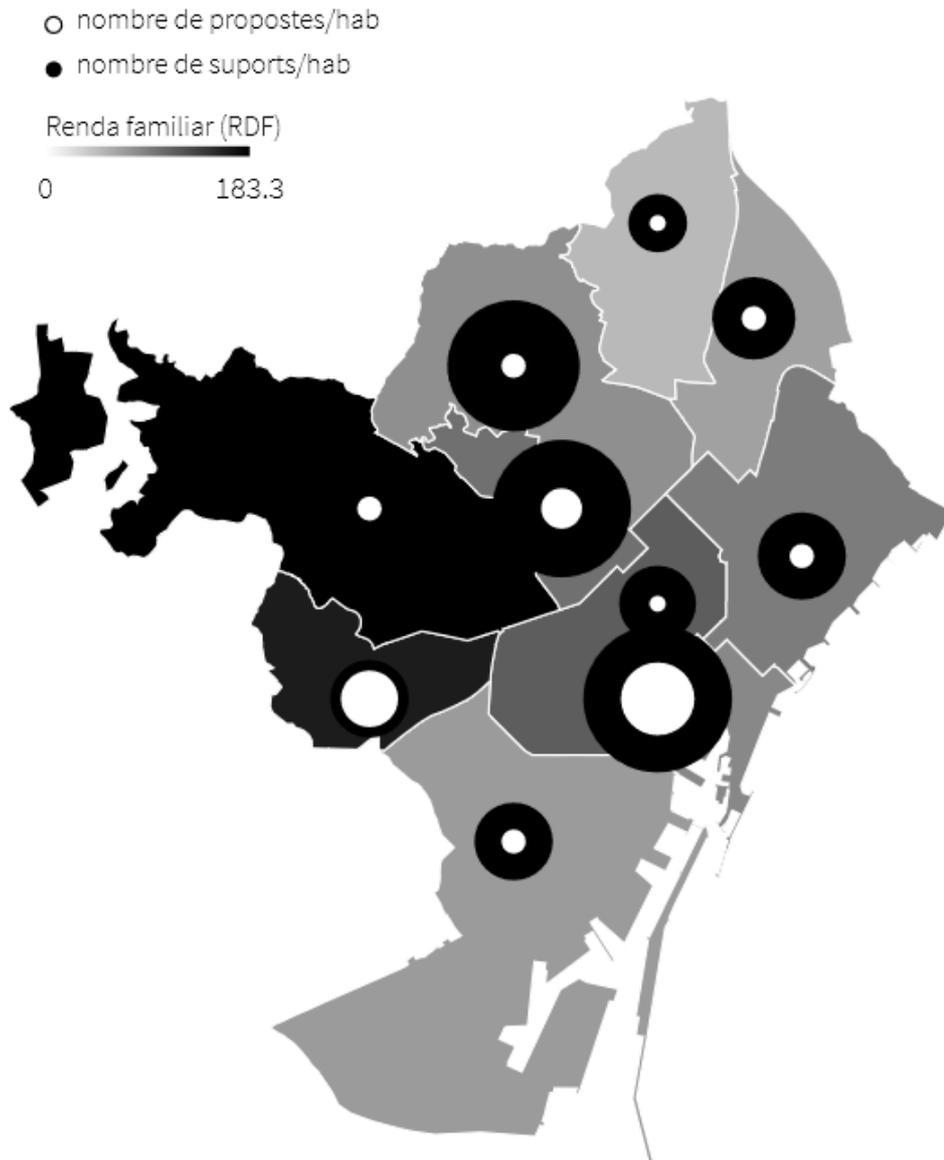


Figure 7: Participation map by district and household income. Darker grey means higher household income. White circles represent the number of proposals per inhabitant (of the district); black circles measure number of supports to initiatives per inhabitant.

Source: Ajuntament de Barcelona.

The map of Barcelona in Figure 7 plot number of proposals per inhabitant, number of supports per inhabitant against household income, all of it for the ten districts in Barcelona. Although data has not been tested for significance there seems to be a positive relationship between household income and the number of proposals per inhabitant. And there also seems to be a negative relationship between the number of proposals per inhabitant and the number of supports per inhabitant.

If that proved true²⁶, we would be seeing yet another evidence of a known fact: that income correlates with empowerment.

The second story that Figure 6 tells us is about the outcomes. It can easily be seen that individual contributions are more likely to fall in the field of wellbeing or ecologic transition, while institutions seem more prone to target “higher level” or more strategic topics like global justice, plural economy or good government. In other words, the individual seems more to look at its own individual benefit, while institutions and organizations have a certain bias for the collective good. If this were true, the composition of participation, collective vs. individual does have an impact in the composition of the final strategic actions. Something to be seriously taken into consideration both for policy-makers as by individual citizens.

On the other hand, rejection level of proposals is also much higher where individuals participated individually (website or face-to-face events) than were institutions or organizations had their voice. There are two explanations for this, both of them compatible one with each other. First of all, institutions and organizations can be more effective in putting out well planned proposals, because of their internal structure and their knowledge of the field and the regulatory framework. Second, because they have a legitimacy that carries the structural support of their members, which translates into well supported proposals that are more likely to be accepted or less likely to be rejected.

A last reflection is about trends. In e-government we are witnessing the increasing shift from offline to online entry points, leading to a virtual single-stop-shop. The trend is likely to be replicated in e-participation. *decidim.barcelona* has so far avoided it – has, in fact, fought this trend. But the future hypothetical sensation that the digital divide is not an issue any more, or that organizations are not useful any more could led government leaders to make a transition towards digital environments. It would be worth remembering that nothing comes for free, and that new environments obey to different organization and participation dynamics and rules. Not only different people will participate (e.g. minorities that now rely on representatives) but their participation will have actual impacts in outcomes.

Towards new, more flexible and plural structures of power?

So, it has been highlighted the fact that access from minorities (low income, deficient access to connectivity, etc.) can have an impact in outcomes. But, is there anything else? We talked above about new ad-hoc lobbies and organizations. It is time to see how flexible and liquid are some of these ad-hoc communities, some of them absolutely tacit – which not at odds with them actually existing.

Figure 8 shows the map of tacit relationships between all participants in *decidim.barcelona* created through their interactions (comments, supports) in each and every proposal. The tension between representation and emancipation, or between marginalized groups and emancipated groups is evident.

²⁶ We can see the exception to this “rule” in the district of Sarrià-Sant Gervasi, the big black district in the upper-left of the map – the wealthiest district in Barcelona, but that also features a high concentration of housekeeping workers and other related domestic services.

The picture shows some clusters that represent institutions or organizations: the Barcelona City Council (big red dot in the lower-right side of the figure), associations of families of students in schools (green dot in the upper-middle, blue/green dot in the lower-left) or neighbour associations (purple dot in the upper-middle). Other clusters, though, are centered in individuals, such as the blue one in the upper-right or the green one in the middle-left.

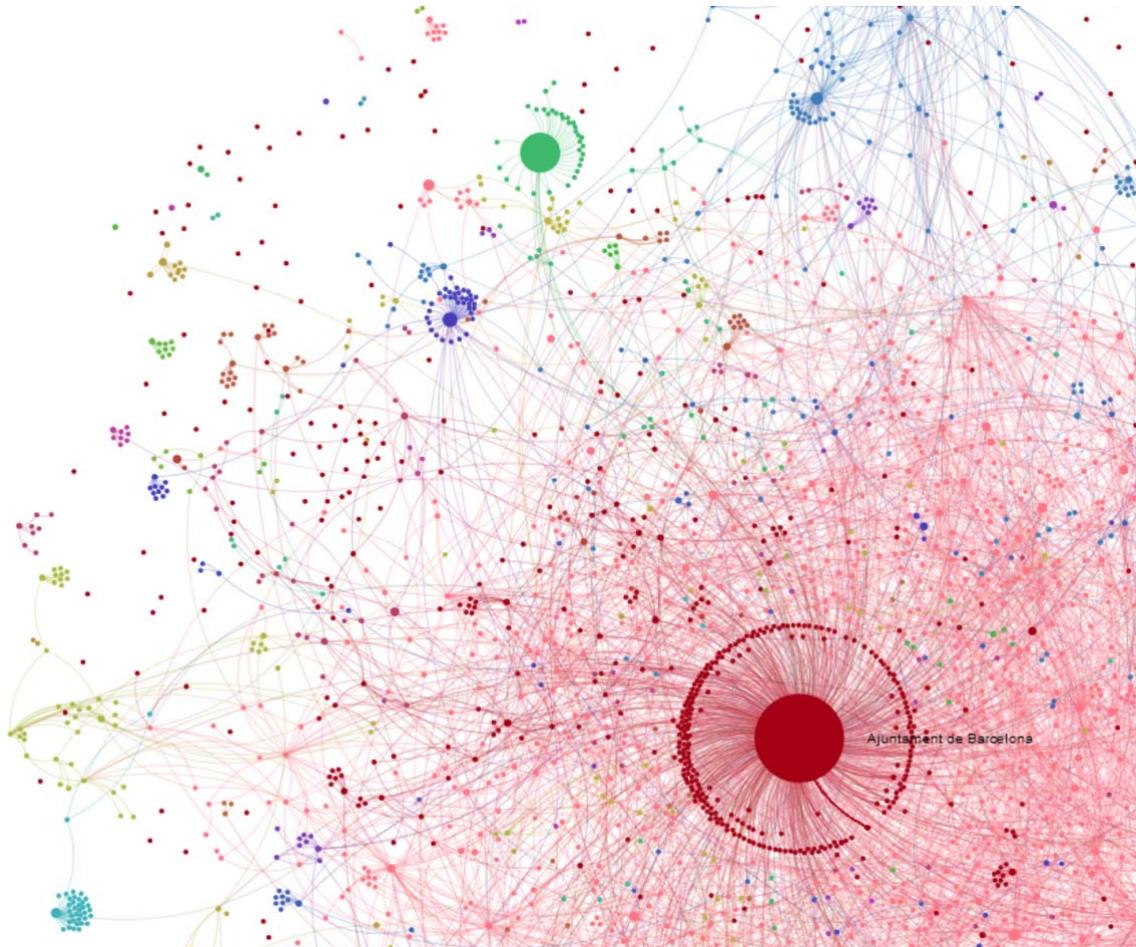


Figure 8: Networks of interactions in *decidim.barcelona*. Source: Ajuntament de Barcelona.

Of course, there are very few nodes (participants) not connected to another node.

This is, clearly, a major impact in existing structure of power in the public sphere. Besides traditional power structures (institutions, organizations) new structures emerge.

1. First of all, the big network of networks, where almost everyone is connected and connected without intermediation.
2. Second, the emergence of (digital?) local leaders (experts?) that cluster around them other citizens making up a (sub)network that works as a tacit community or a tacit organization.

These two factors have to be taken into consideration under the light of aspects mentioned above, like the increase in the weight in online participation in relationship with offline participation, the (slight, but decisive and by design) decrease of the weight of organized or collective participation, the now existing and huge volume of deliberation (absent in previous initiatives) or the change in the increasing volume of

supports.

All this demonstrates that the initial vision to empower the citizen, and given them voice is not just words, but has translated into a real right to be heard. A right to be heard the usual way – through representatives – but also the right to be heard without intermediaries, and with the impact both in composition of the outcome as in the structures of participation. Including a change in the relationships of power in the triangle government-organizations-citizens.

And not only a change in the composition, but a change in the number and kind of actors that take part in the participatory process, and a change in how these actors interact and how para-institutions are created and behave (Peña-López et al., 2014).

How this change in the structures and how this appearance of new tacit structures affects pluralism and diversity is difficult to tell, especially after just one participatory exercise which can become ephemeral if it is not continued in some other way.

Notwithstanding, the difficult balance achieved by the government of Barcelona in preserving collective participation while opening the process to individuals seems to have benefited pluralism and diversity, as the origin of the proposals and thematic actions (Figure 6). That is, there seems to be a good coexistence between the status quo, or the “establishment”, represented by the institutional or organization-centered networks in Figure 8, and new actors and new approaches, represented by both the myriad of individual contributions and the incipient clusters of citizens that collaborate in a given proposal but without establishing a formal relationship like becoming members of the same organization. These entrance of new actors, without altering much the status quo, would be a sign of increased pluralism and diversity. The number of interactions (more than 220,000) and the fact that circa 70% of the proposals were accepted would just reinforce this thought.

Increasing the quality of democracy

Of course, the big question is whether this is having any positive impact in the quality of democracy, which was the very first intention of the promoters of the participatory initiative in Barcelona.

According to what we have commented so far, it is quite evident that *decidim.barcelona* has increased the amount of information in the hands of the citizens, has gathered more citizens around key issues, there has been an increase of participation and this participation has led to proposals that have been widely supported and legitimated and finally accepted to be part of the municipality strategic plan. As pluralism has seemingly increased without damaging the existing social capital, we can only think that the increase of participation has led to an improvement of democracy, especially in what concerns the legitimacy of the decisions made.

This can be summarized in four key points:

- Deliberation becomes the new democracy standard.
- Openness as the pre-requisite for deliberation.
- Accountability and legislative footprint as an important by-product to achieve legitimacy.
- Participation leads to more pluralism and stronger social capital, which fosters

deliberation, thus closing the (virtuous) circle of deliberative democracy.

Although the scheme may be simple, we believe that it already features most of the components of a new democratic participation in the digital age.

Peña-López (2016) draw a simplified scheme for Open Government (Figure 9) which presents the three main components of open government – participation, transparency and collaboration – plus the communication framework – government 2.0 – and the meta-component of the open government project itself.

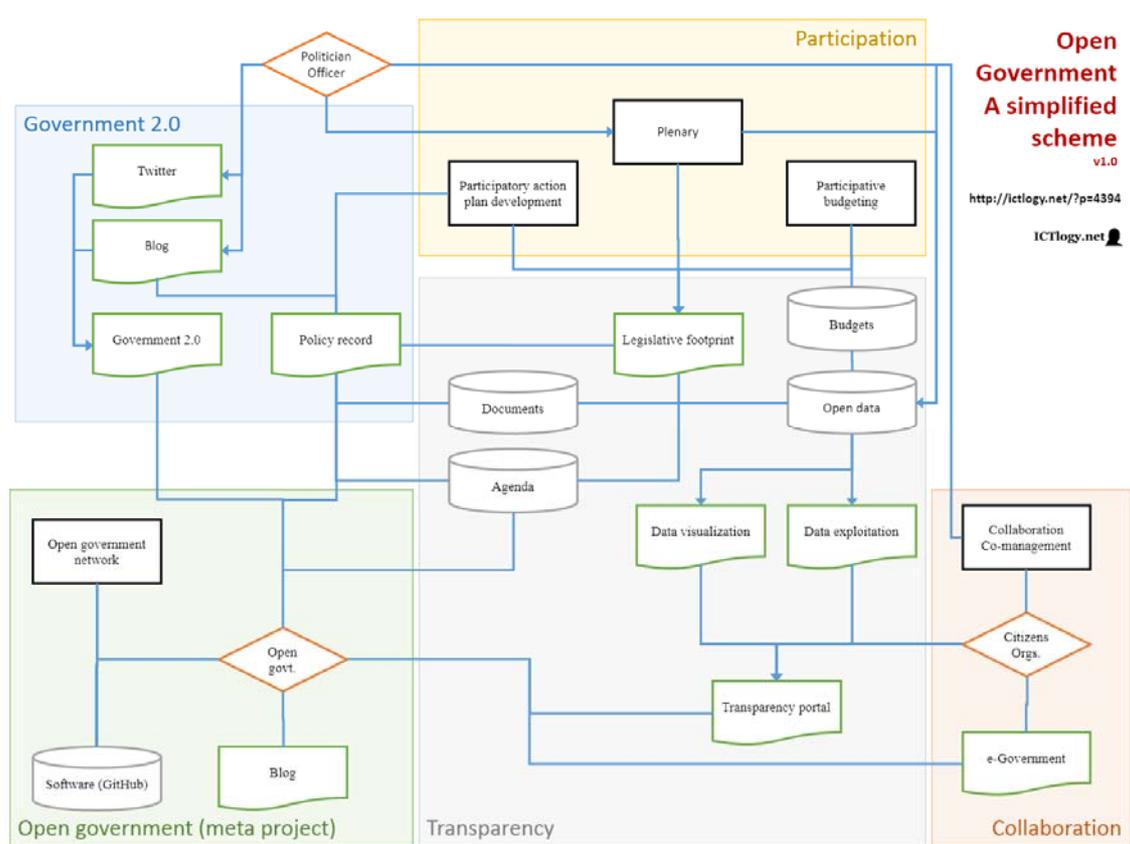


Figure 9: A simplified scheme for Open Government. Source: Peña-López (2016).

We believe that *decidim.barcelona* more or less already includes all these components. Besides the evident participation component, transparency is absolutely present from the very design of the project as in all the stages, procedures, inputs and outputs. In addition, collaboration is fostered by the same typology of the project: to collaborate in defining the strategic plan for the municipality. And to collaborate by also collaborating, among peers or with or within institutions and organizations. Indeed, some of the proposals themselves already include collaboration-based initiatives. The government 2.0 component was also crucial in the makings and diffusion of the project, both by the organization of the process as by the citizens themselves. Last, but not least, the project features its own “meta-project”, which not explains the design and evolution of the project but puts it in the context and network of similar initiatives, as *Decide Madrid* or the coming ones.

What remains being measured and analysed is the strength and stability of the new

relationships of power and how exactly will they challenge the preceding systemic structures and lead to newer ones. Although some aspects have been identified in what relates to new relationships between citizens and organizations and institutions, and in what relates to the creation of new tacit communities, para-organizations and relational spaces, the real trend and hypothetic final scenario will only become clear after several iterations of the same project of after it evolves in a continuum of participations much different from the discrete participatory structures of the present-past.

The transformative citizen engaged initiated by *decidim.barcelona*, though has established some reference points that will have to be thoroughly measured and compared with former parameters that we used to have as guiding lines for defining and assessing democracy.

- The Diminishing role of intermediation and traditional institutions (e.g. governments) and civic organizations, in favour of individual participation and new liquid collectives and para-institutions.
- The increasing role of deliberation, of informed deliberation, measured more than in the number of proposals submitted in the number of interactions and exchanges between participants, tacit – as in supports or comments – or explicit (as in real communications between participants in the digital platform, in events or in social networking sites).
- The balance between institutions (representation), experts (local leaders) and individual citizens, which now create a new ecosystem of actors with the addition of new roles and new relationships among them. There is an increase in the amount of networks and communities, a multiple, liquid and reconfiguring affiliation to these networks that sometimes are indistinguishable from ad-hoc clustering.

These new parameters of participation go hand in hand with three kinds of access or designs of participation:

- Access to information, in order to provide the necessary input and, most especially, context much necessary for deliberation to take place in a qualitative way.
- Access to deliberation spaces, with multiple, distinct and distributed agorae with different compositions, goals and facilitation designs.
- Access to tools, including technological tools, organization architectures, procedures and protocols, and any other kind of resources (including human and financial ones) that facilitate deliberation, make it happen, conduct and coordinate initiatives and, in the end, collect the outputs so that they be implemented to achieve the desired outcomes.

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