



# Shifting participation into sovereignty: the case of *decidim.barcelona*

Ismael Peña-López

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**HUYGENS**  
EDITORIAL



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2019



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SHIFTING PARTICIPATION  
INTO SOVEREIGNTY: THE CASE  
OF *DECIDIM.BARCELONA*

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© 2019, Huygens Editorial  
Padua, 20, bajo  
08023 Barcelona  
[www.huygens.es](http://www.huygens.es)

ISBN: 978-84-17580-07-0  
Legal deposit: B 71174-2019  
Printed in Spain



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## Acknowledgments

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The author wants to thank the guidance, thorough review and suggestions made by Deepti Bharthur, Nandini Chami and Anita Gurumurthy from IT for Change.

The author also wants to thank the indispensable help from Arnau Mon-terde from UOC/IN3; Fernando Pindado, Xabier Barandiaran and Laia Forné, from the City Council of Barcelona, for confidence and valuable help; Ricard Espelt and Francesc Balagué for positively responding to any friendly demand. And to Duncan Edwards for confidence and a terrific job with MAVC.

This research has been produced with the financial support of Making All Voices Count. Making All Voices Count is a programme working towards a world in which open, effective and participatory governance is the norm and not the exception. This Grand Challenge focuses global attention on creative and cutting-edge solutions to transform the relationship between citizens and their governments. Making All Voices Count is supported by the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, and Omidyar Network (ON), and is implemented by a consortium consisting of Hivos, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Ushahidi. The programme is inspired by and supports the goals of the Open Government Partnership.

*Disclaimer:* The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official policies of Making All Voices Count or our funders.





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## Introduction

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The Spanish local elections in 2015 brought to many Spanish cities what has been labelled as “city councils of change”: city councils whose mayors and governing representatives come from parties emerging from the 15M Spanish Indignados Movement. Many of them, led by Madrid and Barcelona, tried to bring into office the same technopolitical practices that proved so useful to articulate a broadly supported movement when out in the streets.

But not only practices were put to work in decision-making at the local level. Also the ethos and values attached to them led, in many ways, with more or less success, the relationship between the local government and the citizenry. These values spin around citizen empowerment, participation, engagement and, in its most ambitious expression, devolution of sovereignty from the government to the citizen.

This book focuses on the socio-political environment where this phenomenon takes place, specifically in Madrid and Barcelona, the two major cities of the state and featuring these so-called city councils of change, and how it was deployed in Barcelona in the first months of 2016 during the definition of the strategic plan of the city. Using Anthony Giddens Structuration Theory, we will be able to assess if not the final outcomes and impact of this technopolitical turn in decision-making – surely too soon for such an assessment to be performed –, at least the main shifts in meaning, norms and power which, as tipping points, can shed a light on the main social trends that these political movements might be unleashing.

In Part I we draw a Policy Brief – Increasing the quality of democracy through sovereignty devolution – were we present the main drivers of change, the essentials of the several shifts brought by the new ethos, and the keys and aspects to be considered to understand the qualitative changes in our opinion already in play in the current political scenario.



Part II – ICT-mediated citizen participation in Spain: a state of the art – revisits e-participation since the beginnings of the XXIst century onwards and most especially in the aftermath of the 15M Spanish Indignados Movement, proposing that recent ICT-based participation initiatives in such municipalities could be far from just polling the citizens and be, instead, the spearhead of a technopolitics-aimed network of cities. We critically explore the role of ICTs in reconstructing politics in Spain and which led to Spain's new experiments in participatory democracy such as *Decide Madrid*, launched in the city of Madrid to enable strategic participatory planning for the municipality, and *decidim.barcelona* another participatory process launched in Barcelona initially based in the former.

This part provides an overview of the normative and institutional state of art of ICT-mediated citizen participation in Spain. The first section depicts the political and civic liberties framework in Spain. In the second section the landscape of ICT mediated citizen engagement is mapped. In the third section, we engage with implications of technology mediations for deliberative democracy and transformative citizenship.

Part III – The case of *decidim.barcelona*: Using a Structuration Framework Towards a Theory of ICT-mediated Citizen Engagement – analyses the participatory making of the Barcelona Strategic Plan (PAM) 2016-2019 for the whole term in office. The first section revisits the general context of the city in terms of ICT-mediated politics and explains the design and general functioning of the new strategic plan and its participatory process. The second section explains the methodology used for the analysis, which is carried on in the third section



PART I

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Policy Brief

Increasing the quality of democracy  
through sovereignty devolution





In September 2015, Madrid, the capital of Spain, initiated a participatory democracy project, *Decide Madrid* (Madrid decide), 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 the 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.

Since the 15M Spanish Indignados Movement, Spain has witnessed a silent but thorough democratic turn, from a crisis of representation to new experiments in participatory democracy, just like *Decide Madrid* or *decidim.Barcelona*. Grounded in the technopolitical movements of the 15M, this turn reflects the critical role of ICTs (and their hacker ethics) in reconstructing politics, as discussed below.

## 1. POLITICS 2.0, E-POLITICS, E-PARTICIPATION AND THE 15M SPANISH INDIGNADOS MOVEMENT

On March 11· 2004, Spain suffered its worst terrorist attack ever in history. Al-Qaeda claimed the lives of almost 200 people in Madrid, after bombing several trains during rush hour. The event happened three days before the general elections that also decides the Prime Minister. This incident occurred one year after the Spanish government had supported the invasion of Iraq, going against the will of almost the entire Spanish population<sup>1</sup>.

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1 Traficantes de Sueños (Ed.) (2004). *¡Pásalo! Relatos y análisis sobre el 11-M y los días que le siguieron*. Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños.



In the period between 2004 and 2011, the Spanish political arena was witness to many citizen initiatives where ICTs played a major role, especially in accessing extra-institutional information<sup>2</sup> and circumventing state institutions to coordinate and engage in political action. Realising the potential of horizontal communication, extra-representative<sup>3</sup> and extra-institutional ways of organising flourished during these years, weaving a dense but distributed network of activists who self-organised and harmonised their ideas, protocols, tools and procedures.

Finally, on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011 came the outburst of the 15M Spanish Indignados Movement. Hundreds of thousands took to the streets and squares of dozens of cities in Spain, demanding better democracy, camping for a full month. The reasons that brought the citizens on the streets, and, later on, in local assemblies, were many – financial crisis, housing crisis, high unemployment (with the highest youth unemployment), corruption, and an overwhelming sense of lack of political legitimacy of democratic institutions. One of the clearest demands of the movement was the improvement of democratic processes and institutions, especially by increasing transparency, accountability and participation with a keen recognition regarding the key role that ICTs could play in realising the same. Ideas of direct democracy, deliberative democracy and liquid democracy were intensively brought to the public agenda, often times by using prototypes<sup>4</sup> that used open, public data, building ICT-assisted decision-making platforms, and/or by making arcane information publicly available and accessible to enable whistle-blowing against corruption<sup>5</sup>.

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2 In the period referred to here, many citizens moved away from traditional institutions (governments, political parties, mainstream media outlets, labour unions, non-profits) to get information or influence the public agenda, and instead, self-organised.

3 According to Cantijoch (2009), extra-representational actions are activities in which, even if participants may be trying to reach an institutional agent as the target of a demand, the action is realised in parallel to the institutional framework.

4 Quickly designed and released digital tools that worked for real, with the purpose to prove that a specific goal or task could easily be achieved.

5 Calvo Borobia, K., Gómez-Pastrana, T. & Mena, L. (2011). “Movimiento 15M: ¿quiénes son y qué reivindican?”. In *Zoom Político, Especial 15-M*, (2011/04), 4-17. Madrid: Fundación Alternativas.

Castells, M. (2012). *Redes de indignación y esperanza*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

Holmberg, S. (2012). *The Spanish Revolution. A study on the 15-M movement in Spain*. Uppsala: Uppsala University



## 2. THE MOVEMENTS ENTER THE INSTITUTIONS

In the short term, the 15M had little effect. It only marginally affected the municipal elections of May 2011<sup>6</sup>, but there was an increase of null and blank votes, and a clear shift of votes from the two major parties to minority/alternative ones. Notwithstanding this, it did contribute to strengthening the network of those citizens who had been active outside of institutions such as organized civil society/ NGOs, labour unions and political parties.

The local elections of 2015, however, brought significant changes to many city councils – Madrid, Barcelona, Cádiz and Badalona, to name a few – with the emergence of parties that were a result of the institutionalisation of some currents within the 15M Indignados Movement. But changes were not restricted only to these municipalities. Even municipalities led by right-wing parties, like Premià de Mar and Manresa, seized the chance to foster participation, with the belief that it was about time to open up institutions, thus answering to increasingly strong demands for openness, transparency and accountability.

The new local governments took office in an environment of strong digital development but a weak culture of participation – arguably caused by the many legal and political barriers to political engagement.

As the data from the World Economic Forum's Networked Readiness Index<sup>7</sup> shows, the overall digital performance of Spain is not very low (35<sup>th</sup> in the global ranking), but the economic and political frameworks usually drag the country downwards in the global ranking. The indicators under the readiness sub-index perform quite well, including what concerns individual usage. But the political and regulatory environment (47<sup>th</sup> in the sub-ranking), human capital or skills (57<sup>th</sup>) as well as business usage (43<sup>rd</sup>) are very low, and government usage and social impact only barely higher (32<sup>nd</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup>) respectively.

In the public sector, Spain has made big efforts not to lag behind digital leaders in terms of public e-readiness and e-government. So, the relative slow de-

6 Anduiza, E., Martín, I. & Mateos, A. (2012). “Las consecuencias electorales del 15M en las elecciones generales de 2011”. In *Arbor. Ciencia, Pensamiento y Cultura*, 188 (756). Barcelona: UAB.

7 Baller, S., Dutta, S. & Lanvin, B. (Eds.) (2016). *Global Information Technology Report 2016. Innovating in the Digital Economy*. Geneva: World Economic Forum and INSEAD.



velopment of the digital economy is in stark contrast to the strong advancement of the digital government. As data from United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN)<sup>8</sup> shows, the efforts have had very good results both in terms of absolute values (as measured by e-government and e-participation indices, ranking 17<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> respectively) and in terms of its relative position in the global ranking. In other words, even if the legislative bodies are not correctly dealing with updating the legal framework to the digital era, the Public Administration is filling this gap through active commitment in digitizing public services and fostering digital uptake.

And, despite the fact that participation is generally – and increasingly – agreed to be a good thing, the reality is that as a concept it still belongs to an industrial era understanding that is almost exclusively institution-led and discrete. This results in isolated initiatives where citizen voice is heard. (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 organisations (Peña-López, et al., 2014; Espelt et al., 2016) which are strong in digital and social media. (Sádaba, 2012). However, these efforts do not seem to be able to establish a dialogue with the institutions of representative democracy in order to perform the task that is needed – reform of the aforementioned institutions (Font et al., 2012).

### 3. *DECIDE MADRID & DECIDIM.BARCELONA*

Madrid, from late 2015, and Barcelona, from early 2016, engaged in a participatory process based on the open source solution CONSUL<sup>9</sup>. CONSUL is the web software initially developed by the City Council of Madrid to support its strategy for open government and e-participation, that was later on adopted by the Barcelona county<sup>10</sup>.

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8 UNPAN (2016). UN e-Government Survey 2016. *E-Government in Support of Sustainable Development*. New York: UNPAN.

9 <https://github.com/consul/consul>

10 Barcelona county is an administrative division that comprises the city of Barcelona and 310 other municipalities. It has an independent government body elected by the local representatives of all the municipalities.



While the former (*Decide Madrid*) mostly focuses on particular proposals and participatory budgeting, the second one (*decidim.barcelona*) has been used as a supporting tool to draft the strategic plan of the city for 2016-2019. 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 through which they can propose, engage with, and monitor all the activities, topics, etc. that they might be interested in.

The success of the initiatives and the strong political vision behind them have caused a proliferation of plenty of other initiatives around the whole state, especially in Catalonia, working to emulate the two big cities. These efforts share free-software-based technology, procedures and protocols and reflections, both on open events as well as in formal official meetings. What began as seemingly a one-time project, has expanded in scope and longevity, with the Barcelona County Council leading the regional level efforts, and other municipalities across Spain sharing the same principles as the Mayors of Barcelona and Madrid.

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

The abundance of open documentation<sup>11</sup> available demonstrates that *decidim.barcelona* has increased the amount of information in the hands of citizens, created momentum around key issues, and has led to an increase in citizen participation. There are several citizen-contributed proposals that have been widely supported and legitimated, and accepted to be part of the municipality strategic plan. There has been an increase in pluralism without damage to existing so-

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- 11 Ajuntament de Barcelona (2015). *Mesura de govern. Procés participatiu per a l'elaboració del Programa d'Actuació Municipal (PAM) i dels Programes d'Actuació dels Districtes (PAD) 2016-2019*. Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona.
- Ajuntament de Barcelona (2016). *73 barris, una Barcelona. Cap a la ciutat dels drets i les oportunitats. Programa d'Actuació Municipal 2016-2019*. Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona. Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona.
- Ajuntament de Barcelona (2016). *El procés de participació per a l'elaboració del PAM i els PAD sobre a tota la ciutadania*. Nota de premsa, 1 de febrer de 2016.
- Ajuntament de Barcelona (2016). *73 barris, una Barcelona. Cap a la ciutat dels drets i les oportunitats. Resum del procés*. Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona. Retrieved August 01, 2016 from <https://www.decidim.barcelona/processes/1/f/27/dataviz/summary>



cial capital. These improved participatory cultures have had a positive impact on democratic processes, especially in creating legitimacy around decision making.

This can be summarised 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.

What remains to be measured and analysed is the strength and stability of the new relationships of power and how exactly these will challenge the preceding systemic structures and lead to newer ones. Some aspects of this shift have been identified in what relates to new relationships between citizens and institutions. They are also evident in the emergence of new tacit communities, para-organisations and relational spaces. However, the real trends and the hypothetical final scenario will only become clear after several iterations of the same project evolve over a continuum of participations, radically different from the discrete participatory structures of the present-past.

What is clear is that the engaged and transformative citizenship initiated by *decidim.barcelona* has established some reference points that need to be thoroughly measured and compared with former parameters used to define and assess democracy. Some such directions include, a deeper study of:

- The diminishing role of intermediation and traditional institutions (e.g. governments) and civic organisations, in favour of individual participation and new liquid collectives and para-institutions.
- The increasing role of informed deliberation, evidenced more than in the number of proposals submitted in the number of interactions and exchanges among participants; both tacit – as in supports or comments and explicit – as in real communication between participants in the digital platform, in events or in social networking sites.



- The balance between institutions (representation), experts (local leaders) and individual citizens, who now make up a new ecosystem of actors with new roles and relationships. There is an increase in the amount of networks and communities; a multiple, liquid and reconfiguring affiliation to these networks that are sometimes indistinguishable from ad-hoc clustering.

These aspects can be summarised in one point: the devolution of some sovereignty in matters of democracy to the citizen in a structural, and not temporary, way.

By leveraging the power of ICTs to bring more actors and more resources into the political arena, democratic processes can improve the state of democracy. Time will tell whether the outcome will be as positive as expected. For now, the die is cast.





**PART II**

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P ICT-mediated citizen participation  
in Spain: a state of the art





## 4. OVERVIEW

In September 2015, Madrid – the capital of Spain – initiated a participatory democracy project, *Decide Madrid*<sup>12</sup> (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*<sup>13</sup> (Barcelona we decide). Both cities are guided by the same political vision and initially used the same free software platform as a base.

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

This part provides an overview of the historical evolution of ICT-mediated citizen engagement in Spain, tracing the movement from top-down, unidirectional institutional-centric initiatives to the liquid, bottom-up networked cultures of participation fostered by the emerging Spanish municipalist technopolitic movement.

### 4.1. Political background

On March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2004, Spain suffered its worst terrorist attack ever in history. Al-Qaeda claimed the lives 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 – whose result also decides the Prime Minister. Also, it occurred

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12 <https://decide.madrid.es/>

13 <http://decidim.barcelona/>



one year after the government of Spain had supported the invasion of Iraq against the will of almost the entire Spanish population (Traficantes de Sueños, 2004).

For three days after the attack, the official version of the Ministry of Home Affairs was that, the attack had been led by the Basque terrorist organization ETA, ignoring available evidence (Traficantes de Sueños, 2004). Two main reasons were behind this behaviour: one the one hand, the fact that the fight against ETA had historically been electorally beneficial, especially for a right-wing party; on the other hand, to avoid acknowledging that there might be a cause-effect relationship between the Spanish participation in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Madrid Attacks a year later, an invasion that the government then in office had led against the will of almost the whole citizenry.

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 the least, failing to challenge the official version. International outlets such as *The Guardian*<sup>14</sup>, *Der Spiegel*<sup>15</sup> and *The New York Times*<sup>16</sup>, 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 Short Message Service (SMS), to demonstrate in front of 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 kinds of citizen initiatives where ICTs played a major role, especially in accessing extra-institutional information<sup>17</sup> and circumventing state institutions to coordinate and engage in political action. Having learnt that all kinds of information

14 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/mar/12/alqaida.spain1>

15 <http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/terror-in-madrid-zuege-von-bomben-zerfetzt-192-tote-mehr-als-1400-verletzte-a-290117.html>

16 <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/12/world/bombings-in-madrid-the-attack-10-bombs-shatter-trains-in-madrid-killing-192.html>

17 “Extra-representational actions are activities in which, even if participants can equally be trying to reach an institutional agent as the target of a demand<sup>1</sup>, the action is realized in parallel to the institutional framework” (Cantijoch, 2009). That is, many citizens moved away from institutions (governments, political parties, mainstream media outlets,



was available and that horizontal communication was a real possibility, platforms, groups, gatherings and all kind of extra-representative and extra-institutional ways of organizing flourished during the years, weaving a dense but distributed network of activists who self-organized and harmonized their ideas, protocols, tools and procedures.

Finally, on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011 came the outburst of the 15M Spanish Indignados Movement. Hundreds of thousands took to the streets and squares of dozens of cities in Spain, demanding better democracy by camping for a full month. The reasons that brought 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 clearest demands of the movement was the improvement of democratic processes and institutions, especially by increasing transparency, accountability and participation. Almost all these demands were realizable by means of ICTs. Ideas of direct democracy, deliberative democracy and liquid democracy were intensively brought to the public agenda, often times by using prototypes<sup>18</sup> to use open, public data, building ICT-assisted decision-making platforms, and/or by making arcane information publicly available and accessible to enable whistle-blowing against corruption. (Calvo et al., 2011; Castells, 2012; Holmberg, 2012).

In the short term, the 15M had little effect. It only marginally 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 this, it did contribute to strengthening the network of citizens who were very active but outside of institutions; totally ignoring other organized civil society organizations such as NGOs and labour unions, not to speak of political parties.

It is worth noting that these new movements not only circumvented the concurrence of the public sector or the organized civil society, but also happened without any sort of support from private capital – which, if anything, was seen as a threat to such movements, acting on their own and outside of the traditional

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labour unions, non-profits) to get information or to influence the public agenda, and self-organized instead.

18 Quickly designed and released digital tools that worked for real, with the purpose to proof that a specific goal or task could easily be achieved.



sphere of institutional participation often monitored – when not controlled – by the private capital lobbies. An example of this is the treatment of most mass media outlets – mostly owned by private capital – fighting hard against these initiatives, which they viewed as a threat to the status quo.

## 4.2. 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 in concurrence with the European Parliament elections in 2014, where it won five seats. Later on in different forms, it won the municipal elections in May 2015 in the two major cities in Spain – Madrid and Barcelona.

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

Madrid – from late 2015 – and Barcelona – from early 2016 – both engage in a participatory process based on the free software solution CONSUL<sup>19</sup>. CONSUL is the web software initially developed by the City Council of Madrid to support its strategy for open government and e-participation, that was later on adopted by Barcelona or the Barcelona county<sup>20</sup> 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 on 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

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19 <https://github.com/consul/consul>

20 Barcelona county is an administrative division that comprises the city of Barcelona and 310 other municipalities. It has an independent government body elected by the local representatives of all the municipalities.



the city, where the citizen will have a personal profile through which they can propose, engage with, and monitor all the activities, topics, etc. that they might be interested in.

One of the most important aspects: the evolution of both platforms has also been influenced by a constant dialogue between both cities. Leveraging 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.

### 4.3. 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 –in their planning, design, development, implementation, evaluation, and escalation to supra-municipal structures (like national 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 acknowledge that these kinds of political and structural developments change perceptions, roles, designs of institutions and, on the whole, represent the crossing of 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 free software; 2. citizens have some flexibility in the way they use technology; 3. there is a concurrence of other political actors such as other municipalities and; 4. governmental bodies adapt to the requirements of the technology and the participatory processes – and not the other way round, as it is the norm<sup>21</sup>. This is not exactly saying that government inadvertently ended up becoming more open than they planned to be, but that most consequences became evident for many in traditional politics once the ball was already rolling downhill.

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21 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 necessarily implied the redesign of some procedures, including actual power shifts within the governmental bodies.



#### 4.4. The legal framework

Participation in Spain, has traditionally been scarce and limited. One reason usually provided to explain this fact lies in the events that happened during the restoration of democracy, after the death of the dictator Francisco Franco and the approval of the Constitution of 1978. The II Republic of Spain (1931-1939) has been chaotic, and 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 to avoid the chaos of the II Republic and, disincentivise another coup d'état.

*The Spanish Constitution of 1978, and laws – like the Ley Orgánica 5/1985, de 19 de junio, del Régimen Electoral General (LOREG)*<sup>22, 23</sup> – are 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 through these institutions. These institutions have often been seen as black boxes whose functioning is only known and mastered from people on the inside, and as having only few ways to contribute or interact with them.

The Internet and the 15M Spanish Indignados Movement—among other things— 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.

*The Ley 34/2002, de 11 de julio, de servicios de la sociedad de la información y de comercio electrónico*<sup>24</sup> (LSSI) enacted in 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*<sup>25</sup> of December 2007 which, with the aim to foster the Government's strategic plan for

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

23 Spanish laws are cited with two numbers – number of law approved that year / year –, the date when it was passed, and its title.

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

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



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, besides *Ley 56/2007*, the *Ley 11/2007, de 22 de junio, de acceso electrónico de los ciudadanos a los Servicios Públicos*<sup>26</sup> (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 central and state government down 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 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. They also set the guarantees for citizens when they act both as customers or as receivers of public services: right to be accurately informed about a product, security in money transfers, possibility to return what was bought, right to complain, etc. That is, mostly bureaucratic issues or transposing rights onto the digital ground.

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 at both ends of the ladder. On one end, they demanded more active interaction, more initiative and more participation. On the other end, they demanded more evidence, more accountability and more information. The outdatedness of the law became even more evident with the cases of rampant corruption that started emerging<sup>27</sup>. The demands for a more robust democracy during the first decade of the 2000s intensified after the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2011 *Indignados* Movement, the appearance of whistle-blowers, and the

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

27 As it has been said, 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.



growing evidence that information, with digital support, could be distributed at a much lower marginal cost than in the past (and, thus, the main reason for the non-disclosure of public information was quickly vanishing).

The *Ley 19/2013, de 9 de diciembre, de Transparencia, Acceso a la Información Pública y Buen Gobierno*<sup>28</sup> was enacted as a response to this lacuna, and to fix the fact that Spain was one of the few western democracies to not 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*<sup>29</sup> was enacted as the regional version of the Spanish Transparency Law. Though slightly improved in some key aspects, in essence it was quite similar to the central law: with no paradigmatic changes (Peña-López, 2014a, 2014b).

Some months before, in September 2014, the Catalan Parliament had passed the *Llei 10/2014, del 26 de setembre, de consultes populars no referendàries i d'altres formes de participació ciutadana*<sup>30</sup> 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), the idea of participation became very popular during the second decade of the 2000s and many Spanish regions and municipalities passed their own participation regulations. However, unlike the transparency law, the Spanish central government never passed a law regulating participation. The Catalan law, unlike others, is quite ambitious and provides a very open framework not only for citizens to be consulted for their opinions, but for civil society to organize, make proposals, and participate in public decision-making. Some of the later deployments of e-participation in many cities, including Barcelona, were framed within this law, especially when it comes to consultations binding decisions. Another reason behind such an ad-

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

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

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



vanced law evident to the locals is 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*<sup>31</sup> and the *Normes reguladores de la participació ciutadana* (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2002) both regulate how citizens can participate.

Most legal overhauls focused on updating governmental procedures to catch up with the new affordances offered by digital revolution, while important challenges of corruption and transparency, participation and citizen consultation, etc. only received minor attention through very inadequate/ineffective laws, ranking among the least ambitious ones among all states in the OECD. But, they also did contribute to the creation of a sensitive environment. 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. Progress on creating an enabling legal framework, however, witnessed a significant roll-back in March 2015, when the Spanish *Ley Orgánica 4/2015, de 30 de marzo, de protección de la seguridad ciudadana*<sup>32</sup> 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. Despite being accurately designed not to fall in blanket censorship, its conscious ambiguity did look for a self-censorship effect.

#### 4.5. 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 among the higher income economies (Peña-López, 2009). According to the Web Foundation’s Web Index, Spain has always ranked below the 20<sup>th</sup> 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. The indicators under the readiness sub-index perform quite well, including what

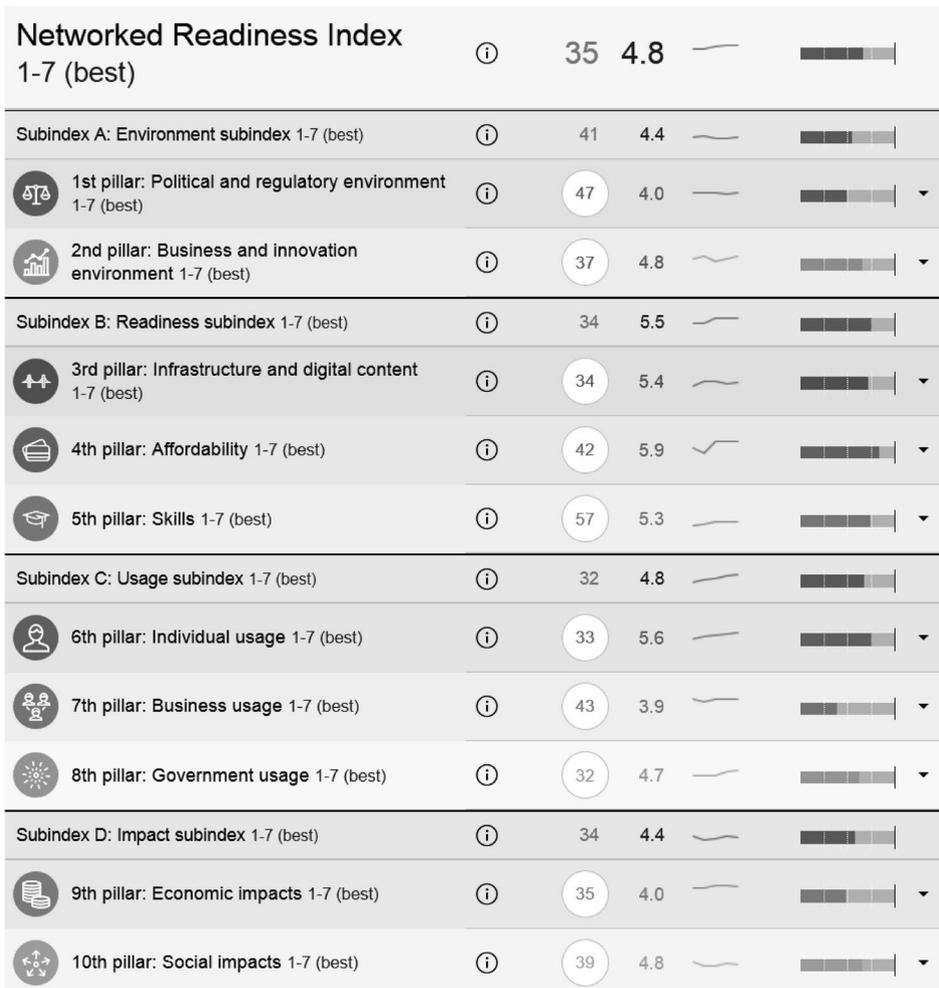
31 Barcelona local charter.

32 Law on the protection of civil security.



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, and government usage and social impact only barely higher. The chronic bad health of the Spanish economy due to delayed institutional reforms, and the faulty privatization of the incumbent telecommunications operator which in turn has produced an imperfect competition in the connectivity market – are two of the main aspects pointed out by experts (Ruiz de Querol, 2006) to explain why the Spanish digital economy has had a hard time taking off.

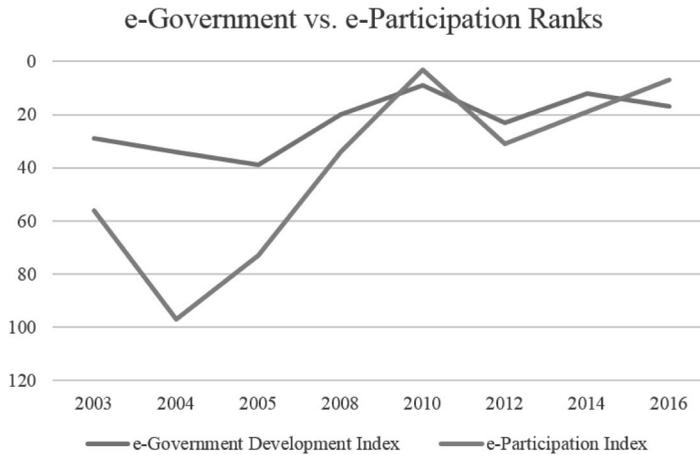
**Figure 1.** Spain in the Network Readiness Index 2016. (Word Economic Forum. See Baller et al., 2016)



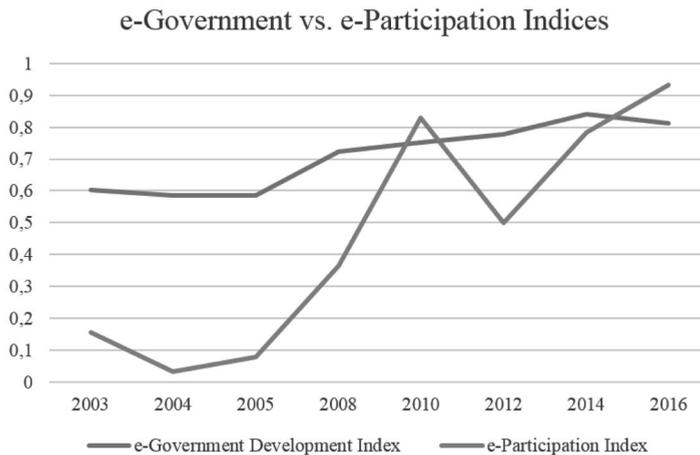


What this data indicates is opposite to what is happening in the public sector, where Spain has made big efforts not to lag behind digital leaders in terms of public e-readiness and e-government. So, the relative slow development of the digital economy is in stark contrast to the strong advancement of 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) and in terms of its relative position in the global ranking.

**Figure 2.** e-Government and e-Participation indices. Data: UNPAN (2016)



**Figure 3.** e-Government and e-Participation ranks. Data: UNPAN (2016)



The whole scenario looks optimistic for ICT-mediated participation: e-readiness levels, (though with room for improvement) are more than adequate. Despite the fact that the digital divide is still an inhibitor for some citizens, digital infrastructure is in place and citizens are using ICTs. The government has deployed a big potential for both the delivery of services and interaction with the citizen. Thus, the arena is quite set for complex participation to emerge in the near future.

But although participation is generally – and increasingly – agreed to be a good thing, the reality is that as a concept it still belongs to an industrial era participation is almost exclusively institution-led and discrete. There is no continuum of participation, merely isolated initiatives where citizen voice is 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, they do not seem to be able to establish a dialogue with the institutions of representative democracy in order to perform the task that is needed – 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 in concurrent with what has been said before: there has been a lot of investment in setting up large-scale ICT platforms and services to broadcast messages to citizens, but not enough attention has been devoted to listening to citizen-voices. So such communication ends up as unidirectional engagement.

**Figure 4.** Voice and accountability in Spain. Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators (2015)

| Indicator                | Country | Year | Percentile Rank<br>(0 to 100)  |
|--------------------------|---------|------|--|
| Voice and Accountability | Spain   | 2004 |  |
|                          |         | 2009 |  |
|                          |         | 2014 |  |

Two examples will illustrate this statement. The first one is the Consensus<sup>33</sup> 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. It has been quite successful where it is used, but 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 form participation which includes deliberation, is now planning a major update of the platform based on the success of *Decide Madrid*<sup>34</sup> 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 upon, enriched, debated or supported.

The second example is about citizen initiatives (in Spain, Iniciativas Legislativas Populares, ILP<sup>35</sup>). Mentioned in the Spanish Constitution (1978) and regulated since 1984, only 142 initiatives have been submitted in more than 30 years, all of them but one was rejected by the Spanish Parliament of unsuccessful in their procedure, as the required 500,000 signatures is an overwhelming barrier for most civic organizations to achieve.

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 do not seem to be.

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

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34 *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, thus making it possible to not only freely use it but also modify it or improve it.

35 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 – the citizen initiative or ILP – that a collective of citizens can propose a law and submit it to the Congress for its approval. The 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.



But beyond that, deliberation and co-decision have been for the most part left aside and in some cases, pulled back or even punished, as can be seen by the several sentences passed by the Constitutional court, ruling against citizen initiatives or projects at lower levels of government to enhance participation<sup>36</sup>.

This is unparalleled with what is happening at the street level. Since the March 2004 terrorist attacks in Spain and the political demonstrations that followed them (Traficantes de Sueños, 2004), the country has been going through a 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., 2017), 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 have called, a total change of paradigm (Jurado Gilabert, 2013; Batalla Adam, 2014), one that directly challenges representative democracy and its institutions.

This new era would be shifting from a democracy centred around institutions to one of technopolitical practices, taking place in a network-based architecture of participation (Monterde, 2015)<sup>37</sup>. Of course there is still room for institutions, but with an organizational design different from the institutions of today, and with greater resemblance to social movements.

The way to make this shift from a traditional institution towards a social movement-like institution (or political party) seems to be rooted in an extensive use of deliberation within citizen movements, political parties and institutions, and an intensive use of ICTs (Borge & Santamarina Sáez, 2015; Haberer & Peña-López, 2016a). And this is, precisely, what could just be happening in the city – and the city council – of Barcelona (Aragón et al., 2015).

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36 See, for instance, how the constitutional jury banned the Catalan law on public consultation: <http://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20150225/54427618116/tc-tumba-unanimidad-ley-consultas.html>

37 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).



## 5. EXPLORING ICT-MEDIATED STRUCTURES OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

In the previous section it was established 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 has taken the lead in ICT-mediated participation, based on intensive interaction, deliberation and, in some cases, making proposals and voting on them.

As it has been explained, though, the most transformative approaches, both in politics and in civic participation came from grassroots organizations and social movements. Cause and consequence, they used ICTs to be able to fetch information, organize themselves, communicate and act. And in doing so, they appropriated technology and transformed its uses thus creating either new technologies or radically new approaches to them.

The case of Barcelona is a very interesting one, as the local elections in 2015 put in office a party that had emerged from one of these civic movements. And what the new city council did was to transpose the philosophy and ethos of the civic movement into the municipal institution.

### 5.1. The institutional ICT-mediated participation context of *decidim.barcelona*

All three levels of government above the citizen of Barcelona have long been running their e-government portals<sup>38</sup>, their transparency portals<sup>39</sup> and their open data portals<sup>40</sup>

The City Council of Barcelona took into consideration several other initiatives –both at the Spanish national level or at the international level– before initiating their own participation project.

38 Spain: <http://administracion.gob.es/> - Catalonia: <http://web.gencat.cat/ca/tramits>  
Barcelona: <https://w30.bcn.cat/APPS/portaltramits/portal/changeLanguage/default.html>

39 Spain: <http://transparencia.gob.es> - Catalonia: <http://transparencia.gencat.cat>  
Barcelona: <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/transparencia/es>

40 Spain: <http://datos.gob.es/> - Catalonia: <http://dadesobertes.gencat.cat>  
Barcelona: <http://opendata.bcn.cat/opendata/en>



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*<sup>41</sup>; *Petitions*<sup>42</sup> from the UK ; and the *Open Ministry*<sup>43</sup> tool for crowdsourcing legislation in Finland. At the Spanish level, two main government-led initiatives were analysed: *Irekia*<sup>44</sup>, launched in 2010 by the Basque Government, arguably the open government pioneer in Spain; and *Decide Madrid*<sup>45</sup>, since Fall 2015, for ICT-mediated participation in Madrid municipality. The preceding two are interesting initiatives but, as it has been said, they are 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 similar to the one in office in Barcelona, in that it aims at putting deliberation at the centre of all political activity, just as many other parties born in the aftermath of the Spanish *Indignados* Movement have. Besides this political or ideological thrust, *Decide Madrid* was designed as a free software project in all its facets: its technology, to begin with, but 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 to go the same way.

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

The institutional arena has very few cases of ICT-mediated participation, the civil society, however, has been much more fertile, especially after the events of May 2011<sup>46</sup>.

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

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41 <https://www.yrpri.org/>

42 <https://petition.parliament.uk/>

43 <http://openministry.info/>

44 <http://www.irekia.euskadi.eus/>

45 <https://decide.madrid.es/>

46 For an incomplete but inspiring list of citizen democracy initiatives please see [http://ictlogy.net/wiki/index.php?title=Citizen\\_democracy\\_initiatives\\_in\\_Spain](http://ictlogy.net/wiki/index.php?title=Citizen_democracy_initiatives_in_Spain)



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, a digital platform that was used to create the alternative social networking site *N-1*<sup>47</sup>, as a substitute of commercial social networking sites as Facebook;
- Questions2Answers for the proposition platform *Propongo*<sup>48</sup>, used to propose ideas, debate them and try and reach consensus on them;
- *Nabú*<sup>49</sup>, for the management of cooperatives and assemblies in general, and production of collaborative documents (Haberer & Anglés Regós, 2016).

The second one is Fundación Ciudadana Civio<sup>50</sup>, which was born in Fall 2011 as a civic response to the 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

47 [https://web.archive.org/web/\\*/https://n-1.cc](https://web.archive.org/web/*/https://n-1.cc)

48 [https://web.archive.org/web/\\*/http://propongo.tomalaplaza.net/](https://web.archive.org/web/*/http://propongo.tomalaplaza.net/)

49 <http://nabu.cooperativa.cat/>

50 <http://www.civio.es/>



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

### 5.3. The strategic vision behind e-participation in Spanish municipalities

The local elections of 2015 brought dire changes in many city councils, with the emergence of parties that were a result of the institutionalization of some currents within the 15M Indignados Movement. These are the cases of Madrid, Barcelona, Cádiz or Badalona, to name a few. But not only in municipalities “of change” changes took place: some other municipalities led by right-wing parties, like Premià de Mar or Manresa, also seized the chance to foster participation in a genuine belief that it was about time to open up institutions, thus answering to increasingly strong demands for openness, transparency and accountability.

The City Council of Barcelona clearly defines (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015) what are the goals of the participative process of *decidim.barcelona*:

- 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.
- To give a leading voice to the citizenry of Barcelona.
- 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.
- To collect proposals that come from plural and diverse opinions and interests.
- To foster the participation of the least active collectives or collectives with more difficulties.
- To foster a culture of active participation, of collective construction of the government of the city and citizen democracy.
- To strengthen the foundations for future processes of citizen participation.



These goals are in line with the ethos of the Spanish *Indignados* Movement and the demands for better democracy in Spain, and which was the central philosophy of the political parties, like *Ahora Madrid* in Madrid and *Barcelona en Comú* in Barcelona, that took 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 interesting for two reasons. On the one hand because it puts the democratic debate, deliberation, in the centre of the project. That is, it is not making proposals that counts, but facilitating 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 *Ireka*. 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 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 to themselves.

Thirdly, through this process there can be 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 not damage – on the other hand – 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.

#### 5.4. Norms informing e-participation

Most, if not all, the norms informing the participation processes are explicit, in concurrence with the ethos of the social movements that held up the political parties that emerged from them or the wind that dragged some other parties already open to participation. Quality democracy, transparency, citizen participation, deliberation-these are the norms that drive the participation process. Of top priority is the total traceability of the process, and of each and every proposal as the basic piece of the system. Every citizen, is able to know at any given time what the state of their proposals is. In addition to the traceability of



the proposals, there is also total transparency on how the process works and at what stage in the process it is in.

Last, but not least, participation is fully open: any citizen of the city 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 difference being that only citizens can vote on proposals (i.e. vote for them). 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.

### **5.5. Impact of new participation: activity, actors and new actors**

Although it is very soon to assess in depth the impact of recent participation initiatives, the available data already provide some evidence on two aspects: the quantitative changes in participation, and some shifts and qualitative changes both at the e level of expectations and in terms of actual realization.

In general, we have witnessed an increase in the number of citizens taking part in different deliberations, but a decrease in the number of proposals. Far from being a bad sign, we believe that this is because there has been a big change in the game of participation: deliberation decreases dispersion and, at the same time, increases the likelihood that proposals are better in quality. We believe that the possibility to have real debates, with the ability to 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 fewer proposals but ensuring that these are better defined and usually supported by several citizens.

However, it is important to note that civic organizations still do participate in e-participation initiatives in municipalities. And with good results: many people still participate through organizations and, in general, their participation has actually increased. It is a fact, though, that more people participated through associations, but more proposals came from individuals. The latter is in line with the findings that organized deliberation leads to less proposals, but quite probably better defined and with much more support than individual participation. We will revisit in depth this question in the third part of this work.



## 5.6. Design and embedded law in *decidim.barcelona*

We have already talked about how the organization was very careful in giving access to different participation environments and spaces, including providing 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. But the right to extend support is reserved to Barcelona's denizens.

Exhaustive information is usually omnipresent in all participation processes: in the form of municipality plans, City Council proposals, comments from peers, etc. This provides transparency on the working of the whole participatory project, and the source and fate of proposals. This also helps in identifying blind spots in information, which often triggers the corresponding demand for disclosure. As it has been mentioned, all the procedures – including the source code of most platforms – are accessible for inspection by any citizen. All dates and venues for face-to-face gatherings are also known in advance. And the state of every proposal submitted.

Deliberation is usually hard-coded in the design of the platform., In this sense, even face-to-face events followed the logic of the platform, as they required being created online, with the attendants (or its number) being updated online, and the proposals made during the event also uploaded afterwards by the organizers and/or a reporter.

Besides submitting proposals, commenting and supporting both proposals and comments was made easy and quite inviting through careful design of the platform and associated events. Sharing proposals in social networking sites contributes to their dissemination, attracts citizen participation, and builds momentum.

Last, but not least, it has created a tacit<sup>51</sup> “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 which 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.

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51 Or not so tacit: supra-local organizations are beginning to lead the spread of participation by ICTs, especially in smaller municipalities.



In this case, what we are surely seeing and will surely see in the future is that governments will be held “captive” by their own participatory designs. In other words, it is very unlikely that the very proponents of these initiatives will be able to step back into traditional politics. The fact that these participatory projects enable distributed participation and decision-making makes co-opting or populist practices more difficult to gain momentum. In this case, distributed participation acts as a checks-and-balances system that. While not infallible, it does reduce the probability of manipulation of the process or its results. This is a surrender that is wanted, but one that is quite bold, especially when the institutional context in Spain and in western democracies in general goes against this trend.

## 6. OBSERVING THE SHIFTS IN MEANING, NORMS AND POWER IN STATE-CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

How are these technopolitical practices really transforming the ICT-mediated participation landscape? Have the political parties emerging from social movement really been able to bring some scent of the revolution to the institutions?

In this section, we will state that, despite the initiative of *decidim.barcelona* is very recent, it has already sowed the seeds for a deep and thorough institutional transformation. Of course, the results and the changes in the institutional infrastructure are fragile in political terms, and are still easy to revert. But the dice are cast for true.

### 6.1. 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 has had 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 have made a call to the “power of the people”, since the end of the 20th century, 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. Indeed, the ethos behind putting the citizen at the centre is the ethos of the Information Age as described by Hima-



nen (2003), and which heavily relies in the ethics of hackers (Levy, 1984) and the distributed way that collective production has been working 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 a wiki mode of government (Noveck, 2009).

Although populism can be the outcome of such an approach (a failed outcome, indeed) 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., 2017).

Under this new paradigm, intermediation or representation is neither necessarily good nor bad. The goal is to unfold new participation spaces, deploy new participation mechanisms. And the primary intention behind this unfolding and deploying is not participation per se, or to pander to 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, an extremely important stage of decision-making, – through deliberation. In other words, it would be 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 fresh contingencies: that 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, 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 a utilitarian standpoint: 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 fluid membership in organizations and lobbies would weaken traditional organizations and institutions. But what we see in *decidim.barcelona* – as a result 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, and they have to relate to other organizations in also new ways (Vilaregut Sáez et al., 2015; Peña-López et al., 2013).

## 6.2. 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).

Most e-participation cases –especially *Decide Madrid* and *barcelona.decidim*– have made a decisive movement towards equalling online and offline participation, and towards shifting the core of the project into the virtual. But, as it has been said, this centralizing of everything online is a matter of digitization so that knowledge management is better performed, comprehensive and totally transparent and accessible. In other words, these initiatives (1) enable online participation and (2) improve knowledge management by centralizing information in the online platform, while (3) maintaining the validity of offline participation modes.

Thus, “digital by default” applies to the management of the project, but not to the way citizens participate. The design of the participatory process is such that no one is left behind, it is guaranteed that everyone can and will participate. Face-to-face events or events and profiles for organizations go in this precise direction.

In general balances in the kind of participation – online vs. offline, individual vs. collective – are successfully achieved.

It is also true that the citizenry entering direct participation is a direct threat to pre-existing ways of collective participation, be they civil society organizations,



local assemblies or similar gatherings. Thus, even if it is true that organizations and institutions still had an important role, the fact that individuals can participate and their proposals be included in the action plans also means that ICT-mediation can not only end the monopoly of institutions, civic organizations, but also of the political and local leaders behind them respectively. And this has been 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.

### 6.3. Towards new, more flexible and plural structures of power?

The preliminary data<sup>52</sup> show that access from minorities (low income, deficient access to connectivity, etc.) can have an impact in outcomes. They also show that some new ad-hoc lobbies and organizations have appeared to better organize around the participation initiative. What we do not know yet is how flexible and liquid some of these ad-hoc communities (most of them informal) are.

New forms of participation have created –or accentuated– a tension between representation and emancipation, or between marginalized groups and emancipated groups. This is, a major impact upon existing structures of power in the public sphere. Besides traditional power structures (institutions, organizations) new structures emerge. These two factors have to be taken into consideration in the light of aspects mentioned above, like the increase in the weight in online participation in relationship with offline participation<sup>53</sup>, 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 support.

All this demonstrates that the initial vision to empower the citizen, and give them voice is not just words, but has translated into a real ‘right to be heard’. A right to be heard, not only through the conventional way, through representatives, but also the right to be heard without intermediaries, and with the impact on the outcome, the composition that lead to those outcomes, and the structures

52 These data will be discussed thoroughly in the third part of this work.

53 Although offline participation was rich and even higher than in former participation processes, this is compatible with the boost in online participation, which grew notably, especially in what relates to commenting, debating and supporting proposals.



of participation, including a change in the relationships of power in the triangle of government-organizations-citizens.

The change in the composition, is not only in the number and kind of actors that take part in the participatory process, but a change in how these actors interact and how para-institutions are created and how they 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.



PART III

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The case of *decidim.barcelona*

Using a Structuration Framework Towards a  
Theory of ICT-mediated Citizen Engagement





## 7. INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDY

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. Six months later, Barcelona – the second largest city in Spain and capital of Catalonia – began its own participatory democracy project, *decidim.barcelona* (Barcelona we decide) in February 2016. Both cities use the same free software platform as a base, and are guided by the same political vision.

The success of these initiatives and the strong political vision behind them have spawned plenty of other initiatives in the country – especially in Catalonia – that are working to emulate the two big cities. These cities are sharing free-software-based technology, procedures and protocols, their reflections – both on open events and formal official meetings. What began as a seemingly one-time project has grown in scale.

Available open documentation suggests that *decidim.barcelona* has increased the amount of information in the hands of the citizens, and gathered more citizens around key issues. There has been an increase in participation, with many citizen created proposals being widely supported, legitimated and accepted to be part of the municipality strategic plan. As pluralism has been enhanced without damaging the existing social capital, we can only think that the increase of participation has led to an improvement of democratic processes, especially in bolstering legitimacy around decision making. A meta-project has indeed opened the design and development of the project itself to the citizens themselves. This can be summarized in four key points:

- Deliberation becomes the new democracy standard
- Openness becomes the pre-requisite for deliberation
- Accountability and legislative footprint emerge 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.

What remains to be analyzed is the strength and stability of the new relationships of power and how exactly these will challenge the preceding systemic structures and lead to newer ones. The culture of participation was hitherto scarce and mainly dealt with managing the support of citizens in top-down type initiatives. Changing the mindset implied turning many of the departments and processes of the City Council upside down – a need for new coordination structures, a new balance between the central administration and the districts, a speeding up of the slow tempos of the administration, and new ways to manage public-private partnerships.

Using Anthony Giddens' Structuration theory, this case study examines the e-participation initiative of the City Council of Barcelona (Spain), *decidim.barcelona*. The study analyzes the inception and first use of *decidim.barcelona* for the strategic plan of the municipality in the years 2016-2019.

The case of the participatory process of the City Council of Barcelona to co-design, along with the citizens, the strategic plan 2016-2019 of the municipality is an important milestone, both in the local politics of the region, and in Spanish politics in general. It embodied the demands of the many that took to the streets in May 2011. The grassroots movement in Barcelona self-organized and won the local elections in May 2015, bringing their hacker and technopolitics ethos<sup>54</sup> to the forefront of local politics. Not only does the way participatory process of early 2016 was put into practice matter, but also how it was technically designed and integrated into the core of policy making in sustainable and replicable ways. This is evidenced in the widespread adoption of this model across other Spanish cities and also by supra-municipal entities. The model, and the tool, is being replicated by Localret (a consortium of Catalan municipalities) and the Barcelona County Council. Both these institutions will replicate the initiative (participation model and technological platform) in other municipalities, while also creating a coordination team to share experiences and methodologies or prioritize needs for improvement.

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54 For an introduction to technopolitics, please see Alcazán *et al.* (2012), Jurado Gilabert (2013), Toret (2013), Monterde (2015), Kurban *et al.* (2017)



The 180° turn that *decidim.barcelona* represents in governance goes beyond just “listening” to citizens and “giving them a voice”. In this case, citizens are;

- Invited to design and improve upon the participatory process
- Invited to contribute proposals that will be debated and could translate into binding legislation (provided some technical and social thresholds are reached).
- Invited to monitor and assess both the process in its procedures as in its outcomes (in what has been called the *Metadecidim* initiative).

This has been done not by substituting other channels of participation but by improving the traditional ways to engage in local politics (face-to-face, channeled through civil society organizations or other institutions) by complementing them with new ICT-mediated mechanisms.

This case study is divided into three main sections. First, we examine the institutionalization of the ethos of the 15M Spanish *Indignados* movement, the context building up to the *decidim.barcelona* initiative. In the next section the methodology, the case, its design and philosophy are discussed in greater detail. Anthony Giddens’ Structuration theory and Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network theory are unpacked here. In the final section, the results of the project are analyzed and the shifts of the initiative in meaning, norms and power, both from the government and the citizen end are discussed.

## 8. CONTEXT

### 8.1. From the Disenchantment of Politics 2.0 to the 15M Spanish *Indignados* Movement

On March 11, 2004, Spain suffered the worst terrorist attack in its history. Al-Qaeda claimed the lives of almost 200 people in Madrid, after bombing several trains during rush hour. The event happened three days before the Spanish general elections for parliament (the outcome of which decides the Prime Minister). Also, the attack occurred one year after the government of Spain had supported the invasion of Iraq against the will of almost the entire Spanish population (*Traficantes de Sueños*, 2004).

From 2004 to 2011, the Spanish political arena became a continuum of several citizen initiatives where ICTs played a major role, especially, in allowing



citizens to access extra-institutional information<sup>55</sup> and circumvent state institutions to coordinate and engage in political action. Realizing that horizontal communication was a real possibility, platforms, groups, gatherings – all kinds of extra-representative and extra-institutional ways of organizing flourished during the years, weaving a large but distributed network of activists who self-organized and harmonized their ideas, protocols, tools and procedures.

In May 15, 2011, this culminated into the 15M Spanish *Indignados* movement. Hundreds of thousands took to the streets and squares of dozens of cities in Spain, demanding better democracy, by camping for a full month to the cry of “they do not represent us” or “real democracy now.” The reasons that brought citizens out to the streets –and, later on, to local assemblies– were many- financial crisis, housing crisis, high unemployment rates, lack of job prospects for young people, corruption, and a sense of lack of political legitimacy of democratic institutions.<sup>56</sup> One of the clearest demands of the movement was the improvement of democratic processes and institutions, especially by increasing transparency, accountability and participation. Ideas of direct democracy, deliberative democracy and liquid democracy were intensively brought to the public agenda, often times by using prototypes<sup>57</sup> to use open, public data, building ICT-mediated decision-making platforms, and/or by making arcane information publicly available and accessible to enable whistle-blowing against corruption (Calvo *et al.*, 2011; Castells, 2012; Holmberg, 2012).

### 8.1.1. *The Movements Enter the Institutions*

In the short term, the 15M had little effect. It only marginally 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

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55 “Extra-representational actions are activities in which, even if participants can equally be trying to reach an institutional agent as the target of a demand, the action is realized in parallel to the institutional framework” (Cantijoch, 2009). That is, many citizens moved away from institutions (governments, political parties, mainstream media outlets, labour unions, non-profits) to get information or to influence the public agenda, and self-organized instead.

56 <http://www.democraciarealya.es/manifiesto-comun/>

57 Quickly designed and released digital tools that worked for real, with the purpose to proof that a specific goal or task could easily be achieved.



blank votes, and the clear shift of votes from the two major parties to minority/alternative ones. Notwithstanding this, the movement did contribute to strengthening the network of citizens who were very active but outside of institutions; totally ignoring other organized civil society organizations such as NGOs and labor unions, not to speak of political parties.

The local elections of 2015 brought about significant changes in many city councils, with the emergence of parties that were a result of the institutionalization of some currents within the 15M *Indignados* Movement – Madrid, Barcelona, and Cadiz, to name a few. While these cities were popularly known as “cities of change” (as popularly referred to in Spanish media) there were also other municipalities that seized the chance to foster participation in the genuine belief that it was about time to open up institutions, thus answering to increasingly strong demands for openness, transparency and accountability.

These new local governments took office in an environment of strong digital development but weak participatory culture – arguably caused by the many legal and political barriers to political engagement (Peña-López, 2017). As data from the World Economic Forum’s Networked Readiness Index shows<sup>58</sup>, the overall digital performance of Spain is adequate. But unsupportive economic and political frameworks usually drag the country down in the global rankings. The indicators under the readiness sub-index perform quite well, including those on individual usage. Technology is used extensively by people in the country. But the political and regulatory environment, business usage and economic impact remain low, and government usage and social impact only marginally higher.

The relative slow development of the digital economy is in stark contrast to the strong advancement of the digital government. In the public sector, Spain has made big efforts not to lag behind digital leaders in terms of public e-readiness and e-government. As data from UNPAN’s e-Government Survey (2016) shows, these efforts have had very good results both in terms of absolute values (as measured by e-government and e-participation indices) and in terms of its relative position in the global ranking<sup>59</sup>.

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58 Baller et al, 2016

59 In 2016, Spain scored 0.81 in e-Government and 0.93 in e-Participation, ranking respectively 17<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>. See also Peña-López, 2017



Despite the fact that participation is generally – and increasingly – agreed to be a good thing, the reality is that as a concept it still belongs to an industrial era conception that is almost exclusively institution-led and discrete. There is no continuum of participation, merely isolated initiatives where citizen voice is channeled into governance (Peña-López, 2011a).

Literature shows that the crisis of participation and representation is increasingly 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, they fail at being able to establish a dialogue with the institutions of representative democracy in order to move towards reform of the former (Font *et al.*, 2012).

## 8.2. *Decide Madrid, Decidim.barcelona*

Madrid – from late 2015 – and Barcelona – from early 2016 – both engaged in a participatory process based on the open source solution CONSUL<sup>60</sup>. CONSUL is the web software developed by the City Council of Madrid to support its strategy for open government and e-participation. Later on, the City Council of Barcelona would develop its own platform, Decidim, and would sign collaboration agreements with the government of the County of Barcelona and the consortium of Catalan municipalities Localret.

While the former (*Decide Madrid*) mostly focuses on particular proposals and participatory budgeting, the second one (*decidim. barcelona*) has been used as a supporting tool to draft the strategic plan of the city for 2016-2019. Both city governments have ambitious plans to make the platforms the axis for all decision making of the city, where the citizen will have a personal profile through which they can propose, engage with, and monitor all the activities, topics, etc. that they might be interested in.

The success of the initiatives and the strong political vision behind them have had a cascading effect, leading to other initiatives working to emulate the two big cities, especially in Catalonia. They are sharing the same or similar free-software-based technologies, their procedures and protocols, their reflections both on open events as in formal official meetings. What began as a one-time project, has grown in scale.

Of course, the big question is whether this has had a transformative impact in the democratic culture of Spain.

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60 <https://github.com/consul/consul>



### 8.2.1. *The Barcelona Strategic Plan (PAM) 2012-2015*

Autumn 2015 was especially hectic in terms of city planning for the city council of Barcelona. The local elections had taken place in May that year and the new mayor appointed a month later, giving way to the typical ‘100 days’ for the new government to take the lead of the city council.

Two strong reasons prompted a rewriting of the strategic plan of the municipality: 1. the important change in the government: from a center-right wing “establishment” party to a far-left “grassroots” one, 2. The imminent expiry of the strategic plan 2012-2015. The government thus began the procedures to create the new strategic plan for the city, with an aim to make it participatory and have strong digital components, both in terms of administrative management and citizen input. Given the party now in office was the heir of the 15M Spanish *Indignados* movement and had intensively and espoused the deep technopolitics ethos at its core, it was expected that it would leverage the potential of e-participation for the design of the new strategic plan.

The PAM 2012-2015, the strategic plan of the municipality (in the Catalan acronym for *pla d’actuació municipal*) for the previous term was already ambitious for its time especially in comparison with other major cities. It intensively used ICTs both for informing citizens and for gathering their opinion and was quite successful according to available data (tecnopolítica.net, 2015a). Indeed, almost one third of total citizen contributions to the PAM 2012-2015 were made by individual citizens through virtual platforms, mostly the official website with a few other contributions made through social networking sites.

As discussed 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 that Barcelona citizens had already had an interesting and successful experience with 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.

## 8.3. Strategic Vision Behind E-participation in Spanish Municipalities

The City Council of Barcelona clearly defines (*Ajuntament de Barcelona*, 2015) the goals of the participative process of *decidim.barcelona*:

1) To elaborate upon 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 the least active collectives or collectives facing additional more difficulties/barriers to.
- 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 are in line with the ethos of the Spanish *Indignados* Movement and the demands for better democracy in Spain, which was the central philosophy of political parties, like *Ahora Madrid* in Madrid and *Barcelona en Comú* in Barcelona, that took 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*.

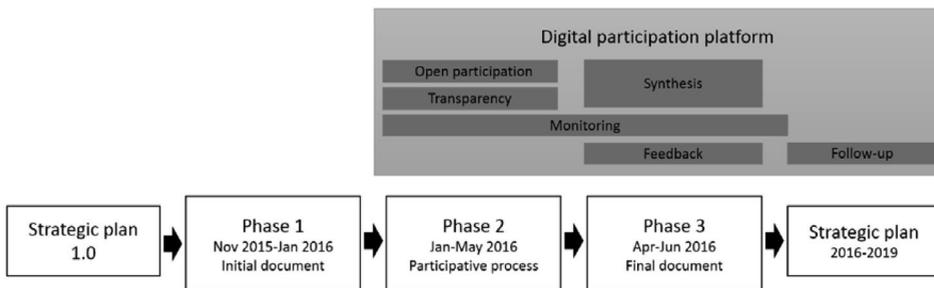
The first is the stress on “providing tools that work for the democratic debate” (*Ajuntament de Barcelona*, 2015). This statement is interesting for two reasons. One it puts democratic debate, and deliberation, at the center of the project. That is, it is not focussed on making proposals, but facilitating deliberation. This is quite different from what Barcelona did in its PAM 2012-2015, and it is different from the Basque Country’s experience with *Irekia*, both of them more intended to “listen” to citizens, while *decidim.barcelona*’s purpose was, over all, to let citizens talk and debate among themselves. Second, the technological and procedural factor is explicitly mentioned under “tools” – digital platforms, events, facilitation by experts, knowledge management tools. Provision of tools is noted as a major concern in order to promote deliberation and this concern is deeply connected with the aim to foster “self-organization, autonomy and empowerment of the citizen” (*Ajuntament de Barcelona*, 2015). This has been a game changer in politics, in Spain in particular, where institutions have traditionally been very eager to keep power to themselves.

Thirdly, through this process, “transversal participation of people and interests” and “participation in common spaces and networks” can happen. In other words, the project will foster community building without damaging existing social capital, such associations or organizations and inputs of experts.



The structure of the whole process aims at making this possible in three phases (Figure 5). Phase 1 will prioritize traditional bodies for participation and channeling 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 Participatory 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 and in different places.
- Transparent, not only in terms of its final outputs – achieved through traceability – but also in the tools that are implicated in the process. Indeed, it is a free software project, from the technological tools to the procedures applied in each phase.
- Committed to the citizen and emphasizes feedback to all the participants.

To spark the debate, the City Council produced a document along with a plan to debate and discuss it at least in 50 topic-related events and 200 district-centered events<sup>61</sup>. To enable the discussion and deliberation around the PAM, two main instruments were created: the PAM-PAD Office and the *decidim.barcelona* platform.

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



The aim of the PAM-PAD Office was to support the whole process and to host a technical commission to accompany it. This commission is made up of 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 and coordination and monitoring of the whole process. In addition, a professional team of facilitators was set up to optimize interactions with the citizens and deliberation sessions.

The *decidim.barcelona* platform in turn, would become the central piece of the whole knowledge management system and run the participation process end to end. Besides holding all the proposals that the institutions, organizations or individual citizens makes, the platform also enables making new proposals<sup>62</sup>, sharing them with other citizens, debating them and providing arguments in favour or against a given proposal, explicitly support them (tacit referendum), coordinate face-to-face events or and monitor proposals.

#### 8.4. Norms informing e-participation

Most, if not all norms informing the participation processes are explicit, in concurrence with the ethos of the social movements that held up the political parties – quality democracy, transparency, citizen participation and deliberation. Of top priority is the total traceability of the process and of each and every proposal. Every citizen is able to know at any given time what the state of their proposal is, which can be in one of the following stages:

- Proposal just submitted.
- Technical acceptance, that is, the proposal is feasible, both in technical as in legal terms.
- Political acceptance, that is, the proposal fits into the general priorities established for the PAM 2016-2019.
- 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.

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62 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



In addition to the traceability of the proposals, there is also total transparency on how the process works and at what stage in the process it is in.

Last, but not least, participation is fully open: any citizen of the city 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 difference being that only citizens can vote on proposals. The deliberation is richer as more people gather for a debate, but only denizens can really vote or prioritize the proposals that will eventually become actions and be put into practice.

## 9. METHODOLOGY

### 9.1. Theoretical Framework

The analysis of *decidim.barcelona* is informed by Giddens' *Structuration* theory (Giddens, 1986). In his approach, Giddens takes a social system both as an exogenous variable as well as an endogenous one. That is, the social system is not only a given context, but also an instrument of change where an outcome of change is the transformation of the system itself. A system can be understood as having characteristics of a structure, but it is not structure. This dualistic approach to structure and its relationship with the system has a parallel in action and agents, where the former are understood as realization of the capability of the latter to perform these actions. Thus, agency is important in the sense that it contributes to structures that shape the perception of a system and embed in them the relationships of power and domination, signification and shared meanings, and legitimation of rules and domination.

Turner (1986), in his review of Structuration theory (1986), draws out the relationship between the key elements or concepts in the theory of structuration. It is interesting to note how, among many other things, structure is both directly and indirectly related with the reflexive monitoring by agents, which can directly affect structure itself, but are also indirectly (instrumentally) related to it through a long chain of relationships. The adoption of technology, especially when done collectively by a group, can be analyzed from the framework of Structuration theory. Poole & DeSanctis (1989) theorized how the appropriation process of a given technology by a group can be shaped as a derivative of Giddens's theory, what they call Adaptive Structuration Theory. A simple scheme of this theory provided by Gopal *et al.* (1993), was improved by DeSanctis and Poole (1994)

to note where social interaction for the appropriation of structures comes to the forefront of the whole process.

But *decidim.barcelona* is not only a process of structural appropriation in technology, but is also an exercise of e-democracy, where two different processes happen at the same time: the ones related with social structures and the “social system” and those related with the appropriation of technology and the “technological system”. Parvez (1986) provides an interesting “double structuration loop” that does take into consideration this double nature (social or political, technological) of structure. Porwol *et al.* (2016) use Structuration to put forth an integrated model for e-participation, in this case interesting because it succeeds to cope the double nature of government- and citizen-led participation. This case study’s approach to *decidim.barcelona* has benefited both from Parvez’s double loop as from (Porwol *et al.* forthcoming) top down vs. bottom up integrated model for e-Participation.

This framework, though, would be incomplete if we believe that this is a mostly technopolitical initiative and that technopolitics are rooted in the very nature of the network society (Castells, 2004; 2007; 2012). In other words, actors use technology in ways that transcend their meaning as tools, becoming spaces, actors or reshaping the system that was once an exogenous variable.

Here, Actor-Network theory (Latour, 2005; 2011) could be helpful. Indeed, in the core of Actor-Network theory lies the idea that agents perform their actions not only within a system, but by being a system themselves. Or, to try to integrate Latour with Giddens, creating network-like structures. Thapa (2014) summarizes Actor-Network Theory in the following table:

**Table 1.** A Summary of Actor-Network Theory.

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Actor (or actant)          | Both human beings and non-human actors such as technological artifacts   |
| Actor-Network              | Heterogeneous network of aligned interest, including people, organizations, and standards  |
| Enrollment and Translation | Creating body of allies, human and nonhuman, through a process of translating their interests to be aligned with the actor-network                           |
| Delegates and Inscription  | Delegates are actors who “stand in and speak for” particular viewpoints which have been inscribed in them, e.g., software as frozen organizational discourse |



|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Irreversibility</b>  | The degree to which it is subsequently impossible to go back to point where alternative possibilities exists                    |
| <b>Black Box</b>        | A frozen network element, often with properties of irreversibility  |
| <b>Immutable mobile</b> | Network element with strong properties of irreversibility, and effects which transcend time and place, e.g., software standards |

Thapa, (2014, p.3), adapted from Walsham (1997)

Actor-Network Theory has been successfully applied to online communities (Mezzolla Pedersen, 2011) and to the analysis of authoritarian regimes and social movements making intensive use of ICTs (Heeks & Seo-Zindy, 2013).

## 9.2. Data Collection

Data for the study analysis was collected in four ways. First, documentation on *decidim.barcelona* including technical reports, official reports and some dissemination outputs was accessed<sup>63</sup>. Research began some weeks prior to the project launch through a collaboration with the research team behind the political design of the platform<sup>64</sup>. Websites and web pages were also studied as part of this.

Secondly, direct observation of the activity on the website was conducted, by creating a user profile and following initiatives between December 2015 from draft versions and prototypes which went on onto the live website on February 2016 and commenced in December 2016.

Thirdly, participant observation in events including importantly, the *Metadecidim* conference, on 25-26 November 2016, in which the *Metadecidim* project was launched to foster participation on the design and improvement of the platform. This participation initiative came at a time when the upgraded version of the digital platform was about to be recoded almost from scratch (winter 2016-2017).

Lastly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with politicians (1), project officers (2) and citizens (2). The rich material available online and collected at events made it possible to gather the impressions and views of a total of 17 key informants – policy-makers, project officers, methodology designers, developers, graphic and User Experience (UX) designers and evaluators.

63 This information has been gathered and listed in the references section.

64 See Peña-López, 2015.



For data analysis, the analytical matrix designed by Gurumurthy *et al* (2016) was used and further adapted, following the literature review and preliminary approach to the *decidim.barcelona*, initiative. This adaptation can be seen in Annex 1. An adapted version of the matrix is reproduced in Annex 2, with data of this research in a brief, schematic way.

## 10. ANALYSIS

### 10.1 Impact of *Decidim.barcelona* in Participation: Activity, Actors and New Actors

It is too soon to assess the impact of *decidim.barcelona* – the project for the PAM began in February 2016 and closed its participatory phase only in April 2016. But available data already provides evidence on two aspects: the quantitative changes in participation, and shifts and qualitative changes both at the level of expectations and in terms of as in some actual achievements of the program. There has been a 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 42,000<sup>65</sup> participated in the PAM 2016-2019.

The number of proposals, though, decreased from 17,751 in 2012 to 10,859 in 2016, which is a decrease of almost 40%, more significant, if we factor in 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<sup>66</sup> in which they would explain their proposal. Thus, there was no debate, no deliberation, no comments among peers. But with the new system, there is the possibility to have real deliberation and the ability to actually see what other citizens submitted, to comment on others' proposals, to highlight the pros and cons of every proposal and even support it. This has enriched debate thus promoting fewer proposals but ones

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65 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

66 Ballots were printed to be used as a template for citizens. The ballot featured a form with pre-set fields that citizens would fill in with their proposals. It made things easier, but also less flexible.



that are 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. This represents a big change in participation mechanisms: how deliberation decreases dispersion and, at the same time, increases the likelihood of quality proposals.

Owing to this and importantly the commitment of the City Council, 70% of 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 and its electoral program (which was also created collaboratively).

One 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 to 13,614 participations to the process and represented 43% of all participants. This ensured that the centralization of management – but not the activity in the digital platform – was compatible with a proactive important role for civic organizations.

This aspect marked a change from 2012, where the break up was just the opposite. In the previous participation process, 56% of the participation was channeled through civic organizations or institutionalized events. On the contrary, only 38% of the citizens did it by using the ballot and other ways (websites, social networks, paper) through which it could be submitted. Notwithstanding this, the number of proposals coming from individuals rose to 60%. This means, 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 fewer proposals, but better defined and with much more civic support than 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 helped strike a balance between city and district level proposals.



## 10.2. Inclusion and Exclusion from Participation in *Decidim.barcelona*

The City Council made strong efforts to avoid access from being a barrier to quality participation. While the digital platform was the central knowledge management back-office, it was not the only entry point. The 410 face-to-face events allowed citizens, social agents and associations to access information, discuss, make proposals, comment, support and diffuse them. Events were created by topic and distributed geographically, so a given topic could be discussed at a given district by any group or individual.

In addition, the “carts” of the Municipal Plan were put on the streets. The carts were mobile participation points that each district had at their disposal to complement the aforementioned spaces. These carts did a total of 265 routes. Lastly, the City Council campaigned hard to foster participation. Besides traditional news and diffusion outlets, 69 communication campaigns in social networking sites and five online debates with the representatives of the City Council were conducted.

In the end, around 1,700 organizations took place in the participation process, usually accompanied by the facilitators from the process office. The role of the organizations and the facilitators was crucial in avoiding exclusion of citizens due to digital access or skills, or other factors (lack of time/interest in politics).

## 10.3. The Dangers of Technocentrism: *Digerati*, *Goverati* or New Participative Citizens?

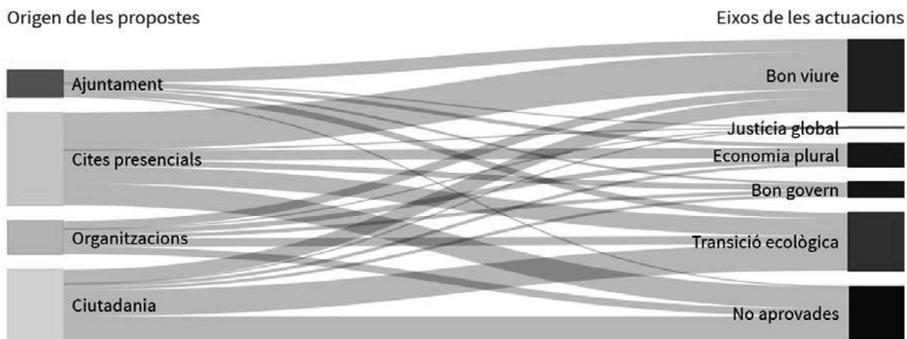
Of course, fostering individual participation and citizen empowerment runs the risk of damage to the social tissue and harm to pre-existing traditional civic organizations, and privileging a certain segment of the population better equipped to engage in online participation. This can end up creating an elite *digerati* and/or *goverati* (Peña-López, 2011b).

While, *decidim.barcelona* has made a decisive movement towards equaling online and offline participation and moving the arena of engagement into virtual space, it has been done with an aim of digitization so that knowledge management is better, comprehensive, transparent and accessible. This does not impede the use of multiple offline entry points and is designed to ensure no one is left behind and are encouraged to participate. Examples of this include face-to-face events and profiles for organizations. Figure 6 shows the origin of the proposals (10,859) and their outcomes in the final strategic actions (1,467) grouped by theme (including the non-approved proposals). The figure tells two different stories.



On the one hand, it shows 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 divide<sup>67</sup>) significantly affected either participation or the final outcome.

**Figure 6.** Origin of the Proposals and Thematic actions



Source: Ajuntament de Barcelona<sup>68</sup> (Left: origin of the proposals, Right: thematic actions)

There is also 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 true that the citizenry entering direct participation is a direct threat to pre-existing ways of collective participation, be them civil society organizations, local assemblies or similar gatherings. However, the fact that individuals could participate and have their proposals be included in the action plans also means that ICT-mediation can definitely end the monopoly of institutions, civic organizations and, most especially, political and local leaders behind them respectively.

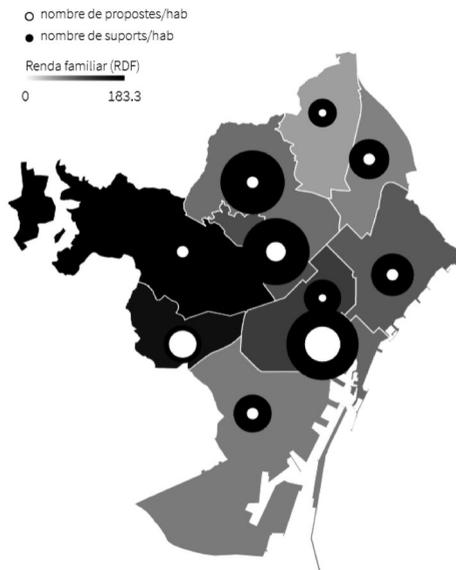
67 See, among others, Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Hargittai. & Hsieh, 2012; Van Deursen & van Dijk, 2013; Van Deursen & van Dijk, 2016; Helsper *et al.*, 2015; Helsper *et al.*, 2016.

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

The map of Barcelona in Figure 7 plots the number of proposals per inhabitant and 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, it does indicate a positive relationship between household income and the number of proposals per inhabitant, which is consistent with what the literature says about participation: that income correlates with engagement and empowerment<sup>69</sup>.

There also seems to be a negative relationship between the number of proposals per inhabitant and the number of ‘supports’ per inhabitant, showing an interesting pattern where a high amount of proposals could be crowding out deliberation. Either people can only devote their time to one thing (put up proposals or debate them) or too much information is a barrier for deliberation. Both aspects offer a gateway for further research.

**Figure 7.** Participation Map by District and Household Income



*Source: Ajuntament de Barcelona* (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)

69 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 second story that Figure 6 tells us is about the outcomes of participation. It can easily be seen that individual contributions are more likely to fall in the field of wellbeing or ecological 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 his/her 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. This is a matter for consideration both for policy-makers and individual citizens and has also been addressed by the literature (e.g. the NIMBY phenomenon).

On the other hand, rejection level of proposals was also much higher in individual submissions (website or face-to-face events) than when represented by institutions or organizations. There are two explanations for this. First, institutions and organizations can be more effective in putting out well planned proposals, because of their internal structure, their knowledge of the field and the regulatory framework. Second, they carry legitimacy and their proposals are 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 in the future, government leaders could favour a more complete transition towards digital environments. It would be worth remembering that nothing comes for free, and that new environments obey to different organizational, participation dynamics and rules.

#### 10.4. Towards Newer, Flexible and Plural Structures of Power?

Figure 8 shows the map of tacit relationships amongst all participants in *decidim.barcelona* created through their interactions (comments, answers) in each and every proposal. The tension between marginalized groups and emancipated groups is evident. The diagram 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 neighbor associations (purple dot in the upper-middle). Other clusters, though, are centred in individuals, such as the blue one in the upper-right or the green one in the middle-left.

Of course, there are very few nodes (participants) not connected to any another node. This is, clearly, a major impact upon existing structures of power in the public sphere.



1) There is a network of networks, where almost everyone is connected and without intermediation.

2) The emergence of (digital) local leaders (experts) that cluster around them and 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 in light of aspects mentioned above, like the increase in the weight in online participation in relation to offline participation, the (slight, but decisive and by design) decrease of the weight of organized or collective participation, the large volume of deliberation (absent in previous initiatives) or the change in the increasing volume of supports.

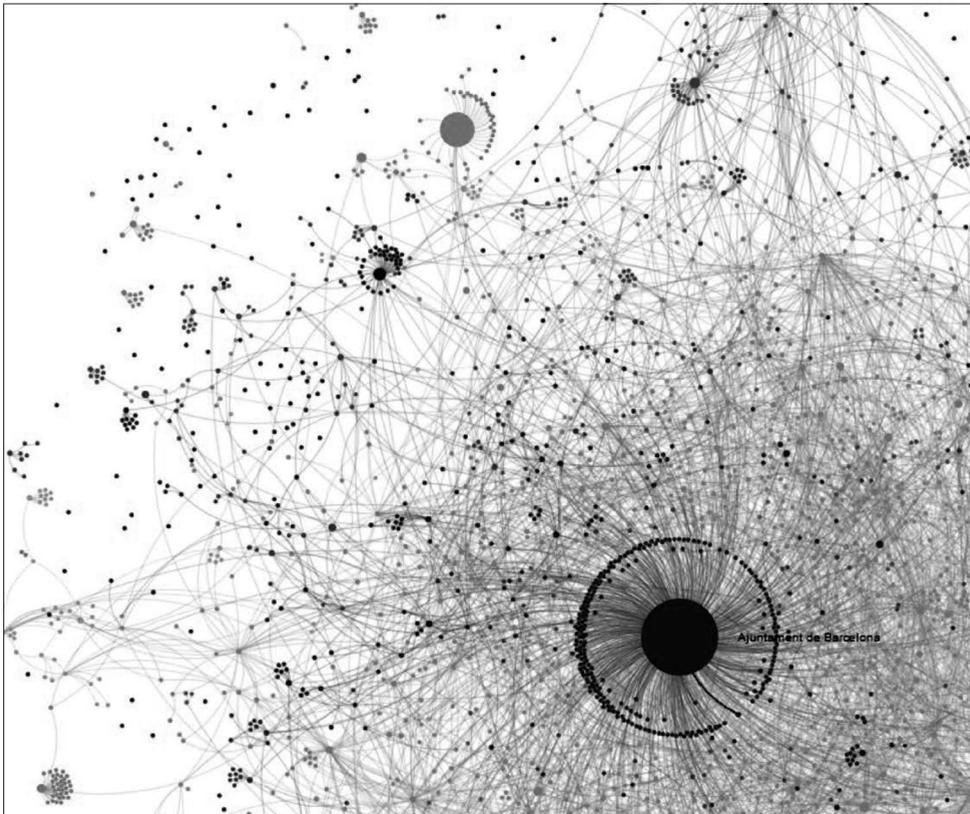
All this demonstrates that the initial vision to empower the citizen has translated into a real right to be heard, not just in the usual way (through representatives), but also without. This change in procedures has also had an impact both in composition of the outcome and in the structures of participation and in the power equations, amongst government, organizations and citizens.

There is a change in the number and type of actors that take part in the participatory process, and a change in how these actors interact, sometimes conforming para-institutions or informal communities that act as institutions as seen from the outside (Peña-López *et al.*, 2014). How the change in the structures affects pluralism and diversity is difficult to tell, especially after just one participatory exercise.

Regardless, 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 demonstrates (Figure 6). There seems to be a harmony between “establishment” networks in Figure 8, and new actors and new approaches, represented by myriad individual contributions and incipient clusters of citizens that collaborate on a given proposal. The entrance of new actors, without altering much of 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.



**Figure 8.** Networks of interactions in *decidim.barcelona*



Source: Ajuntament de Barcelona

## 10.5. Analysis: The Government Side

### 10.5.1. Shifts in Meaning: Institutional Mediation

What is new with *decidim.barcelona* at the government-end is the full awareness that ‘yet another participation process’ will not just re-engage citizens per se. Thus, the first shift in meaning is that participation has to mean (or has to have a certain degree of) a devolution of sovereignty. This implies higher degrees of (self-)governance by means of direct democracy. In this sense, a thoughtful adoption and application of ICTs into politics here directly contribute to citizen empowerment by complementing institutions of representative democracy. But the role of citizens is not only acting as a crutch for traditional politics. Transformative technopolitical movements enable citizens to have more informed de-



liberation and negotiation, leading to better evidence-based decision-making. These new roles especially affect agenda setting. If governments are perceived as failing to diagnose citizen issues and to find solutions to them, citizens will circumvent institutional channels. Some citizens –if not all– can make positive contributions on account of subject expertise, practitioner background and/or being situated in the context.

In this sense, the relationship between public institutions and citizens changes with vertical structures giving way to more horizontal networked governance. But networks also shape institutional behavior and design. If citizens can be part of network governance, they will also be part of the governance of institutions thus affecting. Institutional design will affect institutional design and, thus, agenda setting, deliberation and decision-making.

So, it is not only that the part in the City Council believes that participation is “good”, but that through active citizenship, citizens can regain control–sovereignty– over the processes and institutions that handle decision- and policy-making.

This participation, though, is not a substitute but a complement to “professional” (representative, institutional) politics. It is not necessarily a call for direct democracy or anarchism<sup>70</sup>, but a new tool and a new space which can complement/improve existing mechanisms like assemblies, hearings or plenaries.

### *10.5.2. Shifts in Meaning: ICT-mediation*

This shift in meaning about citizen participation is partly borrowed from the free software movement and hacker ethics. The choice of having the platform behind *decidim.barcelona*<sup>71</sup> a free software solution is deliberate. The interrelation between free software, hacker ethics and technopolitics is underscored. Indeed, there is the underlying idea that as everyone should be able to participate in politics, everyone should be able to participate in software development. This reflection extends to local governments. Again, it is not coincidental that *decidim.barcelona* is a political and technological adaptation of its predecessor in the capital of Spain, *Decide Madrid*.

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70 In the classical politological sense of the term.

71 CONSUL, in its first incarnation, then a brand new solution.



There is a shift in understanding technological design as open for (1) public scrutiny and (2) public participation from all possible actors. Additionally, there is an assertion that technological design must itself be open and participated in a meta-ICT-mediation as evidenced by: the initiative's side-project, *Metadecidim*, where citizens are able to have their say on the process and the technology, in the assumption that anyone can contribute to the design of ICT-mediation structures.

But technology should not be a barrier and should be as transparent and invisible as possible. As discussed before, there is no trade-off between online and offline participation, but complementarity. In this sense, the ICT platform has two main roles. The first and most evident one, to enable online participation. But the second –and probably most important one– to act as a central solution for knowledge management for any kind of participation. Thus, its design will provide at least (1) centralized valid information, (2) online deliberation spaces and support for offline deliberation spaces and (3) publicity of the results.

The idea to provide online ways to participate comes from the belief that some people will find it easier (e.g. people with disabilities, people with tight personal schedules, people not affiliated to civic organizations). There is the belief that a central place for information and gathering proposals and deliberation will give prominence to better or more supported proposals, reduce noise and, in general, organize participation effectively.

When we compare offline vs. online participation, and individual vs. collective participation, the shift in meaning is from atomized and competitive participation to networked and collaborative participation, something that arguably could be better achieved through ICTs, in the same way that free software is developed.

### *10.5.3. Shifts in Norms: Institutional mediation*

From a normative approach to transparency as accountability we see a decisive move towards an approach to transparency as a necessary requisite to collective policy-making in *decidim.barcelona*. This is a crucial change as the political environment in Spain (Peña-López, 2017) in general is very far from this new normative approach, following the trend established with the restitution of democracy in 1978.

Additionally, as a response to disenchantment and disaffection, *decidim.barcelona* believes in going beyond “listening” to the citizens and “engage” them instead. In this vein, transparency and government responsiveness become goals in themselves, as a result of which institutions become more open and closer to the citizens.



Unlike the past, where the administration is at the top of the hierarchy, in a network society the administration is thought to be just a node albeit an important one in the big network of policy-making, made up by other administrations, experts, the citizens affected by public decisions and the citizenry at large. Of course, the administration is an important node, even a hub that concentrates more power and information than other nodes, but a node that facilitates networks and not force hierarchies. In this sense, transparency and accountability are also perceived not only as responsiveness but as the necessary currency for participation in the network society.

To summarize, information is open at three levels:

- Total disclosure of all information on the participatory process as a necessary input for deliberation.
- Total disclosure of all information on the participatory process, including goals and procedures, actors, roles, expected outcomes and political commitments.
- Total disclosure of all information on the technological platform: design, governance, accountability.

Further, what's new is the commitment of the government to taking results as binding and communicate to citizens that their participation is worth the effort. This commitment, to take results as binding applies to both government and citizens alike, thus adding legitimacy of the whole process.

Although secrecy and privacy are guaranteed as a right<sup>72</sup>, the city council highly encourages the citizen to share one's thoughts publicly and openly, to increase the spread and depth of the debate – and, indirectly, make the consultation more binding by escalating social pressure.

Regarding the emergent norms of participation, there are two matters to points to consider. The first one is the aim to have a fair balance in the type of actors inputting into the participation process. This is achieved by weighting down “usual suspects” in citizen participation (i.e. well organized civic organizations that are or not representative from the whole, or even from the main interests of the city), and urging them to bring more people that back them or their proposals into the debate.

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72 See next section



The second matter is the granularity of participation, which is increased by the new digital platform in at least two ways as it allows degrees of participation, from organizing an event to just backing a proposal, including submitting new proposals or commenting on existing ones and also enables participation in a given place (e.g. district) or a given topic, without the need to participate in the whole strategic plan. This makes it easy for citizens to participate according to one's knowledge or interest. It also promotes the idea that any minor contribution can be helpful, and can contribute to increase the legitimacy of a given proposal. The bottom-up approach also reduced instances of trolling during the whole participatory process: with just two recorded cases out of literally thousands of contributions.

Shifts in norms have occurred within the government as well. The new participation platform has implied the mobilization of circa 100 people and a big amount of work to engage public servants, especially those in the department of participation and the district offices. But the important shift was in the functioning of the city council, which had mostly lacked a culture of participation, as stated by some managers of the project. Thus, there was the need to create new coordination structures at two different levels: areas or topics, and the territory or the districts and the neighborhoods. It also required speeding up the slow tempo of the administration, and to establish and coordinate public-private partnerships. It is worth noting that it is not that the city council was actually understaffed –although new hiring, around 30 % of the total workforce– had to be made or externalized. The issue was that the administration was prepared for citizen service, but not for participation. As a change in culture, *decidim.barcelona* is not a one-time project, but a new way to do politics in the long term. In this sense, the effort is seen in terms of an investment.

In the long term, there is a political strategy that is unfolding alongside this shift in norms to extend the platform and the initiative as a whole and embed it in as many processes as possible. Public servants will be able to manage their own projects (and knowledge intensive processes) better. There can be convergences with other municipalities and supra-municipal organizations, and possibly other political parties.

#### *10.5.4. Shifts in Norms: ICT-mediation*

If the field of legitimation has witnessed some important shifts in norms –as tacit and explicit–, we believe that the shift in norms due to ICT-mediation has been much lower. And we believe that this lower impact of ICT-mediation on norms has been sought and that it is a positive aspect of the participation program.

Indeed, there has been a conscious effort to ensure that the shift to ICT-mediation does not cause significant normative upheavals for citizens. One of the main concerns of the City Council was that *decidim.barcelona* represented a deep change in how citizen participation occurred and that technology would therefore represent a psychological barrier. There was thus a need to stress that this was not a participatory process just for “geeks” and that the technology-intensive mechanism was just a sign of changing times.” Effort was also made to keep technology as simple and transparent as possible so as not to exclude some collectives or affect participation negatively.

To begin with, graphic designers, user experience designers and developers worked together to create a friendly environment both for managers and end-users (e.g. citizens, facilitators, rapporteurs). There was training for facilitators, kiosks were set up all over the city and offline and online initiatives were conducted in parallel.

Residents of Barcelona were required to prove their residency where needed to be able to vote on proposals on the platform. Non-residents could participate in everything in the participatory process except voting. To demonstrate citizenship, a check to validate their data was performed against the municipality registry. Once the system checked the citizen as a resident, no personal data was kept, meaning that anyone could participate with a pseudonym to keep their identity anonymous to the public.

Other matters as integrity, non-repudiation and confidentiality were –and still are– dealt by means of the meta-analysis (the *Metadecidim* side-project) and by the free software community around the project<sup>73</sup>. Total openness of the project (and not only code, but all procedures) enable scrutiny by the public at large. The ICT platform allows almost real time analysis for the project managers and timely reporting for accountability of the results by the citizens. An addition is the presentation of data. Visualizations are included in the reporting which facilitates the understanding of complex data.

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73 All the code of the platform is uploaded and maintained from the project’s account at GitHub. See <https://github.com/AjuntamentdeBarcelona/decidim-barcelona>, for the actual version of the platform and <https://github.com/AjuntamentdeBarcelona/decidim-barcelona-legacy>, for the one that was actually used for the PAM 2016-2019



In summary, the use of the technological solution did not affect negatively any collective or former participation practice, but, in any case, enlarged the number of people and collectives being able to participate while improving the existing practices. On the other hand, the City Council also gave up sovereignty over the ownership and design of the platform and gave it away to the community, the community of developers when it comes to technical issues, the society at large when it comes to scrutiny of processes. And maybe this is the only true but meaningful shift in norms from the ICT-mediation point of view: shedding light onto the once black box of citizen participation.

#### *10.5.5. Shifts in Power: Institutional Mediation*

The shifts in meaning and the shifts in norms have inevitably led to serious shifts in power. Seen from a distance, the shifts may not seem that important, especially in quantitative terms. It is undeniably true that most decisions are made at the very same place and by the very same people and in the very same ways than before *decidim.barcelona* took place. But for those decisions made under the influence –or under the direct binding effects of the participatory initiative– the changes are qualitatively huge. Also, if we take into account the increasing pervasiveness of the initiative in everyday life, and the change of culture that was embedded in the initiative, they become significant.

There are two clear shifts of power in the loci of authority. First, from institutions to citizens. Second, from civil organizations to individual citizens. Given that the government returned a certain degree of sovereignty to the citizens, but that it did not do it in the traditional way (i.e. transferring some power to civic organizations or the organized civil society), citizens now have a say, a binding say, in some strategic matters.

This change is accompanied by a change in the layers of intermediation. Some part of the participation has been totally dis-intermediated. While it has often been contended that a technological layer does constitute a subtler but equally real degree of intermediation, what makes *decidim.barcelona* different is that it is not a closed box a closed box that performed some actions through a closed algorithm. The technology layer is completely open and collaborative but does work predictively.

This shift in power in matters of intermediation from civic organizations to individual citizens (and not to technological intermediaries) does not come without compensation to civic organizations. They are also given a greater degree of sovereignty and tools to be more efficient, effective and legitimacy –. We see,



then, the strengthening of civil organizations as intermediaries in given topics where they hold special legitimacy or are seen as experts and in environments where noise was high (asymmetry of information, lack of knowledge to process it, lack of consensus, etc.). In these cases, assemblies and events become more productive thanks to more information, facilitation and mandatory reporting, including the fact that results are integrated and weighted in the central platform. With regard to inclusion, we have already shown how minorities and excluded communities could and actually did participate more (and, one would adventure to say, better). And this was done without the threat of trade-offs between communities that could have been benefited in detriment of others. The various interests and competing claims were accommodated by enabling deliberation. Lastly, collective interests, that took form in face-to-face events, were taken into account by weighting their participation on a given proposal, so that individual interests were not over-represented in relative terms.

In terms of shifts of power there are two issues: technical acceptance – understood as the legal or factual feasibility of a given proposal– and political acceptance –understood as the compatibility of a given proposal within the programmatic priorities of the political term. The latter aspect has been found somewhat “abusive” by some, as in some ways it arbitrarily leaves out some proposals because they will not fit in the government’s electoral program. But, seen from the point of view of programmatic accountability, it only tries to commit to a balance between the will of the participants in the direct democracy exercise and the will of those who participated in the previous exercise of representative democracy. E.g. if the party in office had in its program to foster public transportation, it seems fair that most initiatives to benefit private cars –or directly restrict public transportation– would be disregarded.

To sum up, the shifts in power can be explained on lines of the scheme devised by Welzel *et al.* (2003). There was an objective change, in the way the proposals were accepted (all but the ones technically or politically infeasible) and how they were tracked for compliance (the binding terms and transparency for accountability). There was a subjective change in the way the process was facilitated with the aim to bring confidence to the citizen and empower them to deliberate and make decisions. And there was an effective change in norms – in the inner organization and culture of the City Council, the infrastructures (democratic and technological ones) and provided governance means for further changes, the intake of new participants, and the fact that people participated more intensively in proposal building.



### 10.5.6. *Shifts in Power: ICT-mediation*

The openness of the platform, with all the technology available in Github, and the governance structures around it like the *Metadecidim* sub-project can be seen as an important shift in power in ICT-mediated citizen engagement. In Marxist terms, these infrastructures act as the substructure that determine the behaviour of the superstructure. This has led to large amounts of information in the hands of the citizens, increased circulation due to massive sharing of information. It has also led to a decisive shift of power from representative democracy to direct democracy through a technological backbone that allows deliberative processes without intermediation due to the possibility to participate directly in the very backbone or central office of the participatory process; the fact that citizens have the possibility to submit proposals and not only vote the ones made by the government; the lack of intermediation of deliberation is non intermediated, either by the government or by civic organizations; and the importance of a total lack of “political noise” when it comes to debating pros and cons of the initiatives, as the For instance, government’s officials will not participate in this phase of the debate but act as silent and invisible observers.

*Decidim.barcelona* was not only inspired but backed by its predecessor in Madrid, *Decide Madrid*. They shared the platform<sup>74</sup> and they shared some protocols and, above all, they shared the ethos. The more cities that join this or a similar way of participating, the easier it will be that their citizens “synchronize” in the long (or medium) term. It would seem natural that the famous “think globally, act locally” motto could become actionable if citizens are able to actually participate globally through similar platforms allowing for a global arena for deliberation and a local arena for action. This is, by all means, the creation of a network of cities, which is able to synchronize the policies of its local nodes at the network level. However, it remains to be seen if they can challenge the power of a state.

## 10.6. Analysis: The Citizen Side

### 10.6.1. *Shifts in Meaning: Institutional Mediation*

In the case of *decidim.barcelona*, the assumptions about governance and public service delivery from the citizen point of view are similar to the assump-

74 Not anymore, but did initially



tions the government makes because the party in office arose from citizen movements. In fact, these citizen movements had two main mottos back in 2011: “they do not represent us” and “real democracy now”.

As official sociological barometers on the state of politics and democracy show<sup>75</sup>, from circa 2004 onwards to 2014-2015, there has been an extended feeling among citizens that politicians either do not care about people, do not know about people’s issues or are corrupt. For many, the 15M Spanish *Indignados* Movement was the confirmation that things did not work in politics and that people were well aware of it.

Hence, two different courses of action can be taken. For those still confident in the representation system, to improve its quality by increasing transparency and accountability, not to speak about institutional design. For those having lost all confidence in the representation system, the option is to move towards direct democracy.

If technology had been crucial in the events of the days between the 11 March 2004 train bombings in Madrid and the 14 March 2004 elections, technology was even more decisive during the 15M camps and demonstrations. The disappointing promise of Politics 2.0 was giving way to technopolitics. The disenchantment with institutional politics and the possibility to self-organize was contributing to the idea that DIY politics was a valid alternative and that things could get done by “hacking” the (political) system.

Although the idea to participate in an extra-representative or extra-institutional way is not exactly new<sup>76</sup>, the philosophy behind it is, being to eliminate intermediaries thanks to the empowerment and self-governance that comes with ICTs. This is an important shift in meaning in matters of signification and creating in Gramscian terms, a new cultural hegemony. In its more extreme version, new civil society movements -- fluid and amorphous – favor circumvention over engaging with governments and in the most optimistic scenario, keeping their involvement at a managerial level but leaving political decisions to the citizen. On the other end, the parties emerging from these movements are a solution of compromise trying to translate the ethos of the movements inside institutions.

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75 Peña-López, 2013

76 We can actually track anarchism to the XIXth century.



In this later scenario we have to frame the positioning of many citizens before participation and political engagement –despite these citizens having voted or not for the party in office in the City Council of Barcelona. The claims for some “devolution of sovereignty” or, at least, for some “improvement of democracy” are shared by a majority of left-wing voters (53.27 % in the local elections) and by an important share of the center and center-right voters (36.26 %).

The results of the participatory process and, an assessment of the same, point to a major acceptance of the initiative. What is importantly, citizens believe the promises of the government are congruous with the process. This of course does not mean that everyone approves or backs the government itself. Although its scope is seen to be limited, the fact that it began with the four year (or full political term) strategic plan was perceived as an important message, that has been reinforced since by the proliferation of other (minor) participatory processes. Finally, the fact that the platform and participatory design is being embraced by other cities and supra-municipal organizations ruled by different parties from quite different political colors has been a strong statement for the new approach, creating major citizen consensus about it.

### *10.6.2. Shifts in Meaning: ICT-mediation*

As highlighted before, the government succeeded in avoiding diverting or displacing citizen practices from one place to another, by destroying some participation arenas in benefit of newer ones, but it respected and actually enhanced the existing participation mechanisms.

While this is still true from the citizen point of view, it is also true that the disclosure of new spaces, the virtual ones, was very important and ICTs had a crucial role in this. The possibility to engage and participate in virtual ways was not only new (or relatively new) to the citizen, but also transformative. In two ways. First, it enabled dis-intermediation from civic organizations. Secondly, open participation and the possibility to extend the debates on social networking sites enabled casual engagement and deliberation, which, when added up, turned into richer and more extensive debates.

This later point is not minor, when most digital participation is labeled as “slacktivism”. Increasing the granularity of participation and acknowledging this sort of casual participation was welcomed by many, as the numbers of comments and endorsements tell. The visualization of the informal networks created around discussions clearly shows how rich these discussions can be and the power they hold for a citizen to be recognized as someone who can contribute to the public debate.

This granularity and casual ways to participate (possibility to propose initiatives, possibility to debate and/or improve initiatives, possibility to endorse initiatives, possibility monitor by subscribing to initiatives, topics or by district) only increases the legitimacy and perceived honesty of the initiative, and it is made possible only by the digital platform.

But again, these are new contributions due to ICT-mediation (or ICT enhancement, to speak more properly, as we have shown) and they do not seem to play any substitution or trade-off with other traditional ways of participation. And, if any, it is increasing the satisfaction of these other traditional ways, places or collectives used to participate or interact with the government. They find they have more tools in their hands and that their demands or comments are appropriately gathered and reported to the main website, where they will join the global (in the sense of the global city) debate. So, what we see –and probably will see more in the future– is a progressive convergence of spaces, where face-to-face is completed online, and online is backed by offline events, just like what happened in the camps and assemblies during the 15M demonstrations, which interacted one with each other through virtual spaces and back.

### *10.6.3. Shifts in Norms: Institutional Mediation*

We have seen in previous sections, that in general participation had highly been discouraged by institutions and, thus, citizens have begun to feel disengaged. The crisis of legitimacy of the recent years has only worsened the situation (Peña-López, 2013). *Decidim.barcelona* is perceived as a radical shift in this norm, aspiring to re-legitimate citizen participation. There are three aspects that back this statement. The first is the fact that the citizenry was consulted about something. Of course, there have been consultations but the pervasiveness of the PAM 2016-2019 does not compare with that of the PAM 2012-2015<sup>77</sup> This was perceived by many citizens as a new turn in the state of things. The second, that outcomes of participation was binding. Again, this was new in an environment where legal

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77 We believe, as the external assessment of the plan also states (tecnopolitica.net, 2015a), that the PAM 2012-2015 was a good initiative. But it was good according to the established rules. As we are trying to explain here, its successor was not only good but transgressor.



binding is seldom regarded<sup>78</sup>, not to speak about moral binding. Third, that participation took place in an almost neutral terrain and was not mediated. This is different from other traditional ways to participate in municipalities, which tend to get concentrated in official hearings or formal sessions, and led by a politician or high-rank public servant with a more or less structured agenda. This works towards removing most invisible barriers to do with (self-perceived) legitimacy and (self-perceived) political efficacy.

#### *10.6.4. Shifts in Norms: ICT-mediation*

One of the most obvious shifts evident in *decidim.barcelona* is the absolute acknowledgement that code is law (Lessig, 2009), and being able to cope with ICTs will become one of the fundamental capabilities of the citizen in the nearest future. But technological platforms require technological skills, and social interaction happening in virtual spaces requires digital capabilities that go beyond basic technological and informational literacy –netiquette, knowledge management, digital identity, transmedia communication– which are required to make these new avenues.

Despite the fact that the government attempted to preserve traditional ways of participation, it is also true that some aspects of the participatory process could only unfold at the digital platform, especially access to information and, exclusively, accountability.

First, the online platform became the unique, central back-end of all planning and participation in the municipality. This not only posited a challenge for the working culture of the administration and for the skills of the public servants, but also for the citizens, who saw how information, knowledge management and participation as part of the same political process and not discrete sub-sets.

This shift can be understood as a challenge and as an opportunity. As a challenge because it can become a driver of exclusion. As an opportunity because it represents a clear step forward to a more comprehensive approach to politics and governance, where pieces are more interconnected to each other. This new way to participate, actively, rather than in a passive way, is more complex, more engaging, more rewarding, but also more demanding of personal resources and capabilities, ICTs skills among them.

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78 Broken electoral promises, fights in courts between different Administrations because one of them is not following the agreements reached or even the law, corruption, etc.



So far, facilitation, on the one hand, and weighting of participation for collective participation, on the other hand, seems to have been enough to avoid a situation where tech-savvy citizens monopolize the platform. But there is evidence of the contrary in many other experiences of e-participation when they have scaled up. Thus, this remains a point to be addressed in the near future.

As data show us, there are differences in topics and in proposals depending on their source – those presented at offline events and those submitted online. The debate is also somewhat difficult and supports and endorsements vary from one place to another. The good part is that opening a new space brought with it new ideas and new people. But this means that either there are efforts so that the “old” people with their “old” ideas populate the new spaces, or there is the probability that they will all fade out should the virtual channel become more popular or more supported by the government.

#### *10.6.5. Shifts in Power: Institutional Mediation*

If the shift in power in terms of the government was a devolution of sovereignty in what related to decision and policy-making, the shift of power in terms of the citizens is clearly in agenda setting. There is now a more distributed balance of power between the government and civic organizations, and between civic organizations and individual citizens. Additionally, the possibility to make proposals directly, in a disintermediated way and only within very broad limitations, shifts power not only in the moment of deciding (e.g. in the moment of voting this or that option), but in the moment of setting the agenda for the debate; what topics do we want to debate and how.

In this sense, there also is a shift in power from (mainstream) media to the citizen, which is somewhat new and had only been slightly contested with the popularization of the Web 2.0, especially blogs, and after that with social networking sites. But it is one thing to contest mainstream media, it is another matter to contest them in the field of official agenda setting: agenda setting is now built collaboratively, by making proposals at the website. The monopoly of the administration or media stands broken or, at least, weakened and definitely challenged.

Indeed, not only does the government enable this shift in power in agenda setting, but it also encourages wide publicity of the issues by inviting citizens and making it easy to share their proposals and comments out of the digital platform and onto social media. The final results show that this increase of participation has meant an increase in the number of proposals which, interestingly enough are quite evenly distributed geographically and evenly distributed by topic. The



shift of power has also implied an increase in plurality and representativeness. This means that there was an increase in the participation of minorities and/or an increase in the participation of groups that used to act outside of institutions or established democratic organizations (including civic organizations themselves, of course). This qualitative change might imply some degree of disruption in terms of the knowledge gap hypothesis, that people with less education or income could have joined<sup>79</sup> in higher degrees than in previous times. However, education and income still affect participation in significant ways.

Quantity was accompanied by quality, as there was much more deliberation (at least measured by exchanges of comments, endorsements, votes and contributions in general) and much more publicity of the issues at stake. It is difficult to say, though, that the new platform did not imply an increase of pluralism and diversity. On the contrary, it is arguable that ICT-mediated spaces in citizen engagement did not become echo-chambers but instead facilitated dialogue through deliberation and casual serendipity.

The maps of networks traced thanks to data on digital exchanges also suggest that there was some decrease in partisan politics, enabling more plural deliberations and the creation of bridges between extra-representative participation and institutional politics. This could have been led by new appointed informal leaders, some of them guiding some conversations, but not monopolizing them.

In general, data show that citizens –especially those who participated– found the experience satisfactory as did promoters (i.e. the government) and other intermediaries such as civil society organizations.

#### *10.6.6. Shifts in Power: ICT-mediation*

There is a parallelism of the two main shifts in power from the citizen point of view, those related with institutional mediation and those related with ICT-mediation. We said, concerning institutional mediation, that we considered more important the shift of power in agenda setting rather than the obvious shift of power in the sheer fact of participation as deliberating and voting. In ICT-mediation, the technological agenda setting is an important shift, that is, being able to co-design and co-develop the tool (and its embedded protocols and procedures).

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79 Based on the data for participation in the poorer districts.



If designing institutions and political procedures can end up being more important than taking part in them, the same, thus, can apply to technology, especially when it is increasingly intertwined and embedded with most social acts and manifestations. The people behind the design and production of the digital platform made a tremendous effort to make it open, understandable and to break it into different parts its components – human-computer interaction, graphic design and user experience, data management and data visualization, privacy and security, performance and features, etc. The *Metadecidim* project was precisely created to push forward this shift of power. But the issue of technological sovereignty is still arcane, despite the name quickly resonates with other sovereignties which we are familiar with: human rights, civil liberties etc.

For the shift in power in ICT-mediation to take full effect, three advances are needed. High level of techno-capabilities, which is required to make the best of the online platform (fetch specific information, monitoring, accountability of the process and results), higher level of techno-capabilities to engage in the meta-level of participation (take part in the design of the platform itself) and awareness on the two former issues.

This reflection concludes with an issue that has been discussed before: the network of open and participatory cities. There is a substantial leap that the digital platform can perform to shift power: articulating global responses by synchronizing local demands.

Of course, the leap has to be pushed forward at the political level. But the example of *decidim.barcelona* shows it only requires a small push from governments to enable local participation to have a global voice. Nowadays, citizens, non-resident in Barcelona can participate in almost the whole participatory process of Barcelona. And similar things will happen elsewhere once the system and the procedures are adopted by many other municipalities, as it is beginning to happen. It is a matter of time that municipalities can coordinate efforts at the network level –or the citizens will hack the system to do it instead, by circumventing, once again, governments. In times where –as we have seen in the case of Spain– there is global disaffection in the ways that states handle politics, this becomes a viable option.

## 11. CONCLUSION

It is quite evident that *decidim.barcelona* has increased the amount of information in the hands of the citizens and has gathered more citizens around



key issues. There has been an increase in participation and proposal deliberation towards the municipality strategic plan. As pluralism has seemingly increased without dislodging 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 that define government-led technopolitical processes:

- 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

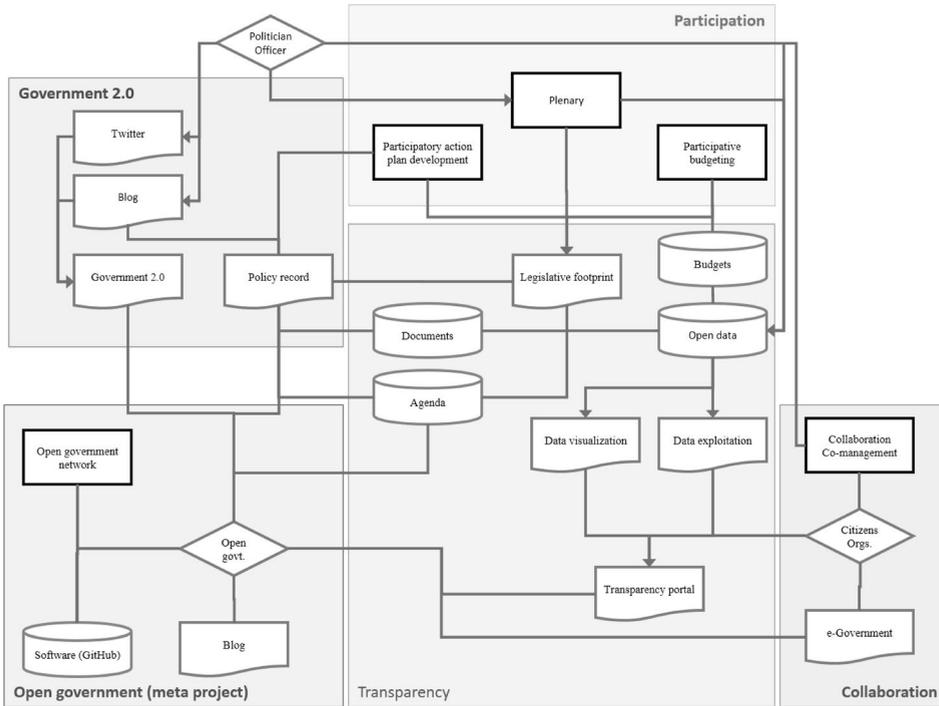
Although the scheme may be simple, it already features most of the components of a new democratic participation in the digital age. A simplified scheme for Open Government (Figure 9) in Peña-López (2016) which presents the three main components of open government – participation, transparency and collaboration, the communication framework – government 2.0 – and the meta-component of the open government project itself.

*Decidim.barcelona* more or less already includes all these components. Besides the evident participation component, transparency is present in the design of the project in all stages, procedures, inputs and outputs. In addition, collaboration is fostered by the project in many ways.: to collaborate in defining the strategic plan for the municipality. And to collaborate by also collaborating, among peers 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 upcoming ones.

What remains to be measured and analyzed is the strength and stability of the new relationships of power and how exactly they will challenge the preceding systemic structures and lead to newer ones. Some aspects have been identified in new relationships amongst citizens, organizations and institutions, and the

creation of new tacit communities, para-organizations and relational spaces. Notwithstanding, the experience of *decidim.barcelona* is yet to have gone through enough iterations to be able to become more clearly defined.

**Figure 9.** A Simplified Scheme for Open Government



Source: Peña-López (2016)

The transformative citizen engagement initiated by *decidim.barcelona*, though has established some reference points that will have to be thoroughly measured and compared with former parameters 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 com-



ments – or explicit, as in real communications between participants in the digital platform, in events or in social networking sites.

- The balance amongst 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 technopolitical participation go hand in hand with three levels of design of technopolitical participation:

- Access to information, in order to provide the necessary input and, context necessary for quality deliberation.
- Access to deliberation spaces, with multiple, distinct and distributed agendas 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.

The key points that define government-led technopolitical processes, in addition to the new three levels of design of technopolitical participation can lead, in our opinion, to global synchronization of e-participation in municipalities. That is, the tacit –or explicit– creation of networks of municipalities that, while acting locally, can resonate and generate global agendas. These global agendas, deeply rooted in their local communities, can benefit from high degrees of legitimacy, social sustainability and the strength of the formal and informal ties of both the organized civil society and individual citizens at large. Things may or may not happen this way. There are too many variables in an increasingly complex world to be taken into account. But the paths are beginning to be paved, and the pace is gaining momentum.





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## Annexes





ANNEX 1. RESEARCH PROBES

| Government-end analysis                            | Institutional Mediation Probes  | ICT Mediation Probes   |
|--|---|--|
| <p>1.1. <b>Signification/ shift in meaning</b></p> | <p><b>Political ethos and participation</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why <i>Decidim.Barcelona</i>? What relationship does it have with the 15M Spanish Indignados Movement and their demands?</li> <li>2. Why is participation good? Is it a devolution of sovereignty? Surrendering to citizen pressure? Why is it better than “professional” representation?</li> <li>3. Will everyone be able to participate?</li> <li>4. How is this different from other ways of participation (assemblies, hearings, plenaries)?</li> <li>5. Why will people be willing to participate?</li> <li>6. What role for established civil society organizations? Are we fostering individual participation?</li> <li>7. Why a need for citizen profile/file in the online platform?</li> </ol> <p><b>Infrastructure governance and relationship with political ethos</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. Why a free software platform? What does this mean for infrastructure governance?</li> <li>14. Can the ethos of FLOSS be transported into political participation?</li> </ol> | <p><b>Individual vs. collective participation</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. How are online and offline participation intertwined?</li> <li>18. How is collective participation weighed?</li> <li>19. What does work better, new proposals or commenting on others?</li> <li>20. Does this build deliberation? Does this build consensus? How are agreements reached?</li> <li>21. How is trolling addressed?</li> <li>22. How are strategies to dominate the debate addressed/prevented?</li> <li>23. How can proposals be analyzed? Can they be exported? Using filters? Can they be managed by groups so that organizations can handle the ones they have interests in</li> </ol> <p><b>Traceability and transparency</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>24. How are decisions traced along all their path?</li> <li>25. How is the whole process transparent?</li> <li>26. How is technology invisible to the user?</li> </ol> |



| Government-end analysis                    | Institutional Mediation Probes   | ICT Mediation Probes   |
|--|--|--|
| <p>1.1. Signification/shift in meaning</p> | <p>15. What kind of coordination with other instances of the City Council (affected by the platform design)?</p> <p>16. What relationships with other cities aiming at running similar initiatives and with the same technology (Consul)?</p>  | <p><b>Barriers and exclusion vectors</b></p> <p>27. How are the digital divides taken into account and corrected?</p> <p>28. What is the impact of (a) having to log in and (b) having to validate your account<sup>1</sup>?</p> <p>29. What are the differences in participation between validated and non-validated users?</p>   |
| <p>1.2. Legitimation/shift in norms</p>    | <p><b>Engagement</b></p> <p>30. How is participation fostered?</p> <p>31. How is participation facilitated for success?</p> <p><b>Internal liability of the decisions in the participatory processes</b></p> <p>8. How are the decisions on the platform liable for the city council?</p> <p>9. What kind of coordination with other instances of the City Council (affected by the platform decisions)?</p> <p>10. Any vision of what to do with the (presumably) new leaders that will emerge from the platform?</p> <p>11. How is <i>decidim.barcelona</i> inspired in the way Barcelona En Comú<sup>2</sup> is organized and looks at party participation and deliberation in general?</p> | <p><b>Identity and content</b></p> <p>38. How is identity/authentication validated?</p> <p>39. How is integrity, non-repudiation and confidentiality dealt with in the platform?</p> <p><b>Meta-analysis and performance</b></p> <p>40. How (statistically) representative is the population of members registered to the platform as a sample of the total population?</p> <p>41. How is the design of the platform adapted according to meta-data analysis?</p> <p>42. What exploitation of the meta-data is performed? (e.g. kinds of proposals per district, age, etc.)</p> <p>43. Is there a reporting of the performance of the site?</p> <p>44. How is performance/quality assured? (i.e. beyond the raw total number of participations or registered participants)</p> |

1 Prove you are a Barcelona resident.

2 Barcelona En Comú: political party founded in 2014 after the 15M Spanish Indignados Movement branch in Barcelona crystallized in a non-formal gathering of assemblages and networks. Now in office at the City Council of Barcelona.



| Government-end analysis                 | Institutional Mediation Probes  | ICT Mediation Probes  |
|---|---|---|
| <p>1.2. Legitimation/shift in norms</p> | <p><b>External liability of the decisions in the participatory processes (putting together liability and political ethos)</b></p> <p>12. What relationship with Decide Madrid? What kind of coordination?</p> <p><b>Policies and strategies</b></p> <p>32. What is the relationship of the initiative with the strategy on Open Government and on Open Data?</p> <p>33. How is the initiative related to the Spanish and Catalan laws on Transparency (e.g. registry of lobbies)? And to transparency and/or e-government rankings?</p> <p>34. How is the whole process – diagnosis, deliberation, negotiation, decision-making, accountability – embedded/referred to in the participatory initiative?</p> <p><b>Overlapping services/windows/entry points</b></p> <p>35. How have internal procedures been changed/adapted to accommodate the initiative?</p> <p>36. How have other official gatherings (e.g. city council plenaries, meetings with lobbies and/or civil society organizations, etc.) been changed/adapted to accommodate the new initiative?</p> <p>37. In what sense <i>Decidim Barcelona</i> substitutes or complements other open channels? What is their future?</p> | <p><b>Meta-participation</b></p> <p>45. What are the normative commitments that the City Council is accepting by accepting the (more or less) given design of the platform?</p> <p>46. How is the technical discussion with other users of the platform (Consul) re-shaping or re-designing the initial participation strategy?</p> <p>47. How open is the City Council to accept changes of design of the platform suggested (explicitly or tacitly) by developers in GitHub? What would the impact in norms be would the changes be accepted?</p> |



| Government-end analysis                      | Institutional Mediation Probes  | ICT Mediation Probes  |
|--|---|---|
| <p>1.3. <b>Domination/shift in power</b></p> | <p><b>Objective change<sup>3</sup></b><br/>           48. Under what conditions are proposals accepted?<br/>           49. How are proposals tracked for compliance?<br/>           50. How are proposals tracked for re-design or re-submission when not accepted due to technical terms?</p> <p><b>Subjective change<sup>4</sup></b><br/>           51. ¿De qué modo los ciudadanos han cambiado su comportamiento después de la iniciativa? (Por ejemplo, pasar de una plataforma a otra, incrementar la participación, etc.)<br/>           52. ¿Cuál es el nivel de aceptación de la iniciativa entre la ciudadanía? ¿Cómo la valoran?</p> <p><b>Effective change<sup>5</sup></b><br/>           53. How has the internal organization chart changed after setting up the initiative (see also #35, #36 &amp; #37)?<br/>           54. How have the main points or locus of decision-making been shifted due to <i>Decidim Barcelona</i> (see also questions #35, #36 &amp; #37)?<br/>           55. How has the platform affected the voice of the organized civil society and their representatives (see also question #6)?<br/>           56. Has the platform identified new relevant actors? Have they been invited to participate elsewhere? Have they been invited to participate in regular meetings/ be members of consulting boards?</p> | <p><b>Meta-usage</b><br/>           57. What is the usage that citizens are doing of meta-data (see also questions #41, #42 &amp; #43)?<br/>           58. What is the usage that mainstream media are doing of meta-data (see also questions #41, #42 &amp; #43)?</p> <p><b>Meta-design</b><br/>           59. What is the participation of the citizens in the design of the platform (e.g. through the GitHub repository)?<br/>           60. How are citizens comparing <i>Barcelona Decidim</i> with similar initiatives (e.g. <i>Decide Madrid</i>)? (you mean a comparison of the uptake of <i>Barcelona Decidim</i> with similar initiatives?)<br/>           61. How are citizens comparing <i>Barcelona Decidim</i> with other deliberation tools (especially those used by post-15M <i>Indignados</i> Movement parties and platforms)?</p> |

3 Welzel, C., Inglehart, R. & Klingemann, H. (2003). "The theory of human development: A cross-cultural analysis". In *European Journal of Political Research*, 42 (3), 341-379. Oxford: Blackwell.

4 *Cit.sup.*

5 *Cit.sup.*



| <p>Citizen-end analysis</p> | <p>Institutional Mediation Probes</p> <p>(see also questions in section 1.1.a)</p> <p><b>Aims for participation</b></p> <p>62. What is the acceptance of the premises of the 15M Spanish Indignados Movement? What is the acceptance of a “political axis” related to re-generation of democracy (besides the traditional right-left or social axis)?</p> <p>63. What claims for a “devolution of sovereignty” are citizens (explicitly or tacitly) making?</p> <p>64. Is it discontent with the government or an aim for co-management or co-decision-making that drives citizens towards participation?</p> <p>65. What is the credibility of the initiative (e.g. honest or propaganda)?</p> <p>66. What is the perceived utility of the initiative (e.g. will make a change or waste of time)?</p> <p><b>New citizen structures</b></p> <p>67. What new intermediaries/platforms/collectives are emerging related to citizen organization or participation?</p> <p>68. What new intermediaries/platforms/collectives are emerging related to citizen organization or participation catalyzed of put under the spotlight by Decidim Barcelona?</p> <p>69. What (citizen) media outlets have appeared as an answer or reaction to the initiative of Decidim Barcelona?</p> <p>70. Are mainstream (local) media putting in the public agenda issues raised in the platform?</p> | <p>ICT-Mediation Probes</p> <p>(see also questions in section 1.1.b)</p> <p><b>Reinforcement or substitution</b></p> <p>71. Is citizen participation shifting from one place to another? Is the platform crowding out other ways of participation? Why?</p> <p>72. Is citizen participation now increasing elsewhere?</p> <p>73. Are other (digital) spaces now converging (by changing their strategies) towards Decidim Barcelona (i.e. using Decidim Barcelona as their starting and end point)?</p> <p><b>Spread of technopolitics</b></p> <p>74. Is the debate now more informed (wherever it takes place)?</p> <p>75. Is technopolitics now populating other ways/places of participation (e.g. other organizations now using digital tools for deliberation)?</p> |
|-----------------------------|--|--|
|-----------------------------|--|--|



| Citizen-end analysis                    | Institutional Mediation Probes   | ICT-Mediation Probes   |
|---|--|--|
| <p>2.2. Legitimation/shift in norms</p> | <p>(see also questions in section 2.1.a)</p> <p><b>Enhancement of citizen voice</b></p> <p>77. How is Spanish and Catalan law enabling participation? How does <i>decidim.barcelona</i> leverage this or how does it go beyond these norms?</p> <p>78. How do citizens view the likelihood that their actions will have an impact on decision-making? In general and through <i>Decidim Barcelona</i>?</p> <p>81. What is the evaluation of the responses given by the government through <i>Decidim Barcelona</i>? Tacitly (through decisions) or explicitly (through messages and communications in the platform)?</p> | <p>(see also questions in section 2.2.b)</p> <p><b>Digital divides</b></p> <p>82. How did access to digital infrastructures affect participation?</p> <p>83. How did digital skills affect participation?</p> <p>84. How did having to participate online (instead of offline) affect participation?</p> <p>76. Are tech-savvy citizens more dominant in the new platform?</p> <p><b>Legitimacy</b></p> <p>85. To what extent participating online is the same as participating offline? Is it “real” participation? Better or worse?</p> <p>86. To what extent making proposals online is different or the same as offline?</p> <p>87. To what extent deliberating (e.g. making comments) online is different or the same as offline?</p> |



| <p>Citizen-end analysis</p>           | <p>Institutional Mediation Probes</p>  | <p>ICT-Mediation Probes</p>   |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <p>2.3. Domination/shift in power</p> | <p>(see also questions in section 2.3.a)</p> <p><b>Quality of conversation</b></p> <p>79. How is discourse in Decidim Barcelona different from what is found in other institutional spaces?</p> <p>80. How is discourse in Decidim Barcelona different from what is found in other informal spaces? How is it different from what is found in social media (e.g. Twitter)?</p> <p><b>Impact</b></p> <p>88. What is the degree of citizen satisfaction with the initiative?</p> <p>89. What is the degree of satisfaction with the way the initiative is working?</p> <p>90. What is the degree of satisfaction with the government for putting out the initiative?</p> <p>91. Can citizens see any outcomes directly related to their participation?</p> <p><b>Extra-representative politics</b></p> <p>92. Have some informal spaces of participation and activism (e.g. assemblies, civic centres, cooperatives become more central?)</p> <p>93. Have some main actors lost some intermediation role after Decidim Barcelona?</p> <p>94. Have some new leaders emerged?</p> <p>95. Can we find a positive impact on internal political effectiveness (i.e. self-confidence in one's own political opinion/position)?</p> | <p>(see also questions in section 2.3.b)</p> <p><b>Effectiveness</b></p> <p>96. Are citizens willing that the platform increases its functionalities?</p> <p>97. Are citizens willing that the platform substitutes other participation devices or spaces?</p> <p>98. Do citizens feel more empowered/autonomous in the platform vs. other options?</p> <p><b>Exclusion</b></p> <p>99. Who have been the excluded/damaged/negatively impacted) by the initiative?</p> |



ANNEX 2. ANALYTICAL MATRIX

| Government-end analysis  | Institutional Mediation Structures   | ICT Mediation Structures |
|--|--|--------------------------|
| <p>1.1. Signification/shift in meaning</p> <p>a. What vision of citizen engagement informs emerging governance practices?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A citizen disengaged and disenchanting with institutional politics.</li> <li>• A massive amount of information in the hands of citizens.</li> <li>• Proliferation of deliberation agorae managed by citizens themselves.</li> <li>• A citizen empowered by ICTs to act on their own by means of technological practices and circumventing institutional channels.</li> </ul> <p>b. What implicit and explicit premises underscore this vision?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governments are failing to diagnose citizen issues and to find solutions to them.</li> <li>• Citizens can contribute to better diagnose citizen issues and to provide solutions for discussion.</li> <li>• Some citizens – if not all – can make positive contributions to the debate around diagnosis and solutions, because they are part of the issue or because they are knowledgeable about it.</li> </ul> | <p>d. In the technological design of e-participation, what meanings and assumptions about participation, citizen will, citizen voice, citizen agency and deliberation are reflected?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technological design must be open for (1) public scrutiny and (2) public participation from all possible actors.</li> <li>• The debate about the technological design must itself be open and participated (meta-ICT-mediation).</li> <li>• Assumption that anyone can contribute to the design of ICT-mediation structures.</li> <li>• There is no trade-off between online and offline participation, but complementarity.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– ICT platforms have two main roles: (1) acting as a central solution for knowledge management for any kind of participation and (2) enabling online participation.</li> <li>– Design must provide at least (1) centralized valid information, (2) online deliberation spaces and support for offline deliberation spaces and (3) publicity of the results.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Some people will have it easier to participate if they can do it online.</li> <li>• Some people will be eager to participate if they can do it online.</li> <li>• A central place for information and gathering proposals and deliberation will give prominence to better or more supported proposals, reduce noise and, in general, organize participation.</li> </ul> |                          |



| Government-end analysis                    | Institutional Mediation Structures   | ICT Mediation Structures  |
|--|--|---|
| <p>1.1. Signification/shift in meaning</p> | <p>c. How is 'network governance' or PPPs in governance changing the meaning of citizen participation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Network governance is part of institutional design in an Information and Network age.</li> <li>• Networks shape institutions (design, behaviour).</li> <li>• If citizens can be part of network governance, they will be part of the governance of institutions.</li> <li>• Being part of the governance of institutions will affect institutional design and, thus, agenda setting, deliberation and decision-making.</li> </ul>  |   |
| <p>1.2. Legitimation/shift in norms</p>    | <p>a. How are transparency, government responsiveness and social inclusion recast/ redefined in emerging governance structures and practices?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If political disenchantment and disaffection by citizens are true, transparency and government responsiveness become goals in themselves.</li> <li>• Transparency and accountability also perceived not only as responsiveness but as necessary pieces in participation in an information and network age.</li> <li>• The government seen as yet another node (although an important one) in the network of citizens. Transparency as a component of the gift economy and responsiveness as part of the ethos/trust upon which a network is built.</li> </ul> | <p>d. How do digitally mediated structures and processes (MIS, big data, biometrics, platform algorithms) influence norms of e-participation design, delivery and uptake?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology kept as simple and transparent as possible so as not to exclude some collectives or affect negatively participation.</li> <li>• Thorough facilitation bot in offline and online channels to ease ICT-mediated participation.</li> <li>• Total parallelism of offline and online initiatives so as not to exclude some collectives or affect negatively participation.</li> <li>• Contributions open to any citizen. Improvement and increase in the potential pool of contributors (e.g. citizens from other municipalities).</li> <li>• Essential but quite minor verification procedures to guarantee that voting is limited to denizens of the municipality.</li> <li>• Meta-participation (participation in the design of the ICT-mediated processes and platforms) highly encouraged.</li> </ul> |



| Government-end analysis                 | Institutional Mediation Structures   | ICT Mediation Structures |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| <p>1.2. Legitimation/shift in norms</p> | <p><b>b. What are the emergent norms for citizen engagement (including policies for e-information, e-consultation, e-decision making)?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total disclosure of all information on the participatory process as a necessary input for deliberation.</li> <li>• Total disclosure of all information on the participatory process, including goals and procedures, actors, roles, expected outcomes and political commitments.</li> <li>• Total disclosure of all information on the technological platform: design, governance, accountability.</li> <li>• Tacit – and most of the times explicit – assumption that the results are binding and, thus, participation is worth the effort.</li> <li>• Secrecy and privacy a guaranteed right, but invitation to share one’s thoughts publicly and openly highly encouraged.</li> </ul> <p><b>c. How are norms of decision making changing?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More balanced weighting in all actors: institutions, organizations, lobbies, individual citizens.</li> <li>• Commitment to take results as binding.</li> <li>• Commitment, from citizens, to accept the results as binding.</li> <li>• Granularity matters and widely accepted as a good thing. No need to make “great” or “complete” contributions. Minor contributions are helpful, to say the least, to increase the legitimacy of a given proposal.</li> </ul> |                          |



| Government-end analysis                | Institutional Mediation Structures   | ICT Mediation Structures   |
|--|--|--|
| <p>1.3. Domination/ shift in power</p> | <p>a. What changes are evident in the following areas and how do they change state-citizen power:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. in the locus of authority</li> <li>2. in the layers of intermediation</li> <li>3. in transparency, accountability and inclusion?</li> </ol> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear shift of locus of authority from institutions to citizens.</li> <li>• Clear shift of locus of authority from civil organizations to individual citizens.</li> <li>• Strengthening of civil organizations as intermediators in given topics where they hold special legitimacy.</li> <li>• Strengthening of civil organizations as intermediators in environments where noise was high. Assemblies and events more productive as reporting is mandatory and results integrated and weighted in the central platform.</li> <li>• Total transparency a must, including the design of the participatory process.</li> <li>• Total accountability a must, from the values that drive the design of the participatory process to the binding results and political commitment to them.</li> <li>• Almost real-time transparency and accountability on the participatory process itself.</li> <li>• Increased inclusion of minorities and excluded communities: keeping the traditional channels results in no exclusion of traditional participants, special care for new channels contributes to the inclusion of non-participants.</li> </ul> | <p>c. How do techno-design structures and processes of government shift power between state and citizen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Massive sharing information increases the balance of power between administration and citizen.</li> <li>• Shifts of power from representative democracy to direct democracy as there is political commitment to take results as binding (within the programmatic lines of the party in office).</li> <li>• Citizens have the possibility to submit proposals and not only vote the ones made by the government.</li> <li>• Deliberation is non intermediated and happens among citizens. No “political noise” when it comes to debating pros and cons of the initiatives.</li> <li>• Civil servants – not politicians – responsible for the first selection of proposals only under a strictly technical (budget, legal) basis.</li> </ul> |



| Government-end analysis         | Institutional Mediation Structures  | ICT Mediation Structures |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 1.3. Domination/ shift in power | <p>b. How are various interests and competing claims accommodated and addressed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Possibility to make proposals, comment them and endorse them.</li><li>• Possibility to organize groups to make proposals and to endorse them compatible with individual participation.</li><li>• Collective interests taken into account in a weighted way so that individual interests are not over-represented.</li><li>• City-council programmatic initiatives or preferences the only limit that frames the whole participatory process, compatibilizing representative democracy with direct democracy.</li></ul> |                          |



| Citizen-end analysis                       | Institutional Mediation Structures  | ICT Mediation Structures   |
|--|---|--|
| <p>2.1. Signification/shift in meaning</p> | <p>a. What changes are evident in the following areas and how do they change state-citizen power:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Politicians do not care: let representative democracy give way to direct democracy.</li> <li>• Politicians do not know: let representative democracy give way to direct democracy.</li> <li>• Politicians are corrupt: let representative democracy give way to direct democracy.</li> <li>• The 15M Spanish Indignados Movement was the ascertainment that things do not work in politics and people are well aware of it.</li> <li>• The way the 15M Spanish Indignados Movement took place was the ascertainment that things can be – and especially work – very different in politics.</li> <li>• Technopolitics is not Politics 2.0 and is here to stay.</li> <li>• DIY politics increasingly an attractive idea.</li> <li>• The possibility to “hack” politics a more attractive idea rather than being involved in politics.</li> </ul> | <p>c. How are citizenship practices recast through new ICT channels?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledgement of the potential of citizens’ views.</li> <li>• Increased legitimacy of the participation process: total disclosure of intentions, specific goals, new actors, new approaches.</li> <li>• Honest approach to make institutions listen to the citizens.</li> <li>• Option to participate as a collective and/or on a collective face-to-face event, or individually online.</li> <li>• Possibility to propose initiatives.</li> <li>• Possibility to debate and/or improve initiatives.</li> <li>• Possibility to endorse initiatives.</li> <li>• Search, filter, subscribe to initiatives, topics or by district.</li> </ul> |



| Citizen-end analysis                       | Institutional Mediation Structures  | ICT Mediation Structures   |
|--|---|--|
| <p>2.1. Signification/shift in meaning</p> | <p>b. What new civil society formations define citizen engagement with government? (for eg. new democratic movements)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All traditional democratic institutions (parliaments, parties, unions, non-governmental organizations) are lacking legitimacy, efficacy and effectiveness.</li> <li>• Horizontal, network-like movements are more flexible and allow for more granular engagement.</li> <li>• There is a lack of valid intermediaries between governments and citizen formations.</li> </ul> | <p>d. How do emerging techno-mediated citizen engagement spaces (portals, mobile-apps, twitter townhalls) impact citizen agency, dialogue, negotiation, and voice and 'right to be heard'?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals do not need to be represented.</li> <li>• Individuals do not need to be intermediated.</li> <li>• Increased role and legitimacy of traditional citizen organizations: "now they have a voice" and a participated one (not contradictory with previous statements).</li> <li>• Debates happen openly and disintermediated – but are reported either automatically (online platform) or by human facilitators (face-to-face events).</li> <li>• ICT platforms allow for self-organization by the citizen: proposals, debates (online or offline), commenting, endorsement.</li> <li>• Citizens can team up with other citizens from other municipalities             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– More and stronger arguments.</li> <li>– Possibility to lobby on more than one municipality at once.</li> <li>– Networked citizens for networked municipalities.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |



| Citizen-end analysis                     | Institutional Mediation Structures  | ICT Mediation Structures  |
|--|---|---|
| <p>2.2. Legitimation/ shift in norms</p> | <p>a. <b>How do new regulatory frameworks enhance/ restrict citizen voice? (right to free speech/ assembly, content regulation, censorship)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulatory landscape increasingly restrictive in Spain in terms of freedom of speech, especially online.</li> <li>• Contradictory movements in the institutional political arena where claims for openness, transparency and “listen to the people” are combined with messages for letting citizens out of decision-making (“they do not know”, “it is too complex”).</li> <li>• Political communication dangerously shifting towards media intensive propaganda.</li> <li>• New participatory processes being an oasis where things can be said and even happen.</li> </ul> <p>b. <b>How are citizen perceptions of government responsiveness altered?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divergent responses at the 15M Spanish Indignados Movement aftermath.</li> <li>• New political parties claiming to embody the 15M ethos.</li> <li>• Traditional parties claiming to embody the essence of parliamentary democracy.</li> <li>• Among this turmoil, new initiatives for participation appear as limited but real improvements to give voice, to aggregate preferences.</li> </ul> | <p>c. <b>In what way have ICT capabilities become intrinsic to performing citizenship and exercising citizen voice? (i.e. learning to be a citizen)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The online platform has become the unique, central back-end of all planning and participation in the municipality.</li> <li>• Information, knowledge management and participation as part of the same political process.</li> <li>• Taking part in the political process – understanding, participating, monitoring it – require now ICT capabilities if one wants to take full advantage of the improvements. For a traditional approach, ICT skills are just not more needed than before.</li> <li>• Passive citizenship requires no more skills; active citizenry will increasingly demand ICT capabilities to be fully exercised.</li> <li>• Facilitators, training and especial venues (kiosks, libraries, etc.) have been devoted to bridge the digital divide and bridge the two worlds of traditional participation and enhanced participation.</li> </ul> |



| Citizen-end analysis                         | Institutional Mediation Structures  | ICT Mediation Structures  |
|--|---|---|
| <p>2.3. <b>Domination/shift in power</b></p> | <p><b>a. How is power distribution evidenced in civic life (citizen participation, citizen will, citizen voice, citizen agency and deliberation)?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agenda setting is now built collaboratively, by making proposals at the website. No more the monopoly of the Administration or media.</li> <li>• Acceptance of proposals, within pre-defined (but wide enough) limits, is a matter of gathering supports/endorsement from all citizens.</li> <li>• More distributed power from the government, media and civic organizations to individual citizens.</li> <li>• Increased participation of individuals, in no detriment of the participation by civic organizations.</li> <li>• More proposals, more evenly distributed geographically, more evenly distributed by topic.</li> <li>• Much more deliberation.</li> <li>• Much more publicity of the issues at stake.</li> </ul> <p><b>b. Do emerging spaces of citizen engagement reflect/ promote pluralism and diversity? (Are ICT-mediated spaces in citizen engagement becoming echo chambers reinforcing the status quo or are they disruptive?)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased participation of minorities.</li> <li>• Increased participation of groups that used to act outside of institutions or established democratic organizations (including civic organizations).</li> </ul> | <p><b>c. What techno-capabilities mediate citizen engagement online?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online platform made easy. Not major “digital knowledge” required to participate – offline traditional participation always an option.</li> <li>• Higher level techno-capabilities are more required to make the best of the online platform (fetch specific information, monitoring, accountability of the process and results).</li> <li>• Even higher level techno-capabilities are required to engage in the meta-level of participation: take part in the design of the platform itself.</li> </ul> <p><b>d. How do patterns of access impact political voice?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The possibility to circumvent political representative institutions and civic organizations – extra-representative politics:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increases the scope of voices.</li> <li>– Increases the legitimacy of the process, as organizations (in general) can be monopolized by a few voices, unlike individual participation.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |



|                             |  |   |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| <p>Citizen-end analysis</p> | <p><b>Institutional Mediation Structures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Some decrease of partisan politics, enabling more plural deliberations.</li><li>• Some disruption in terms of the knowledge gap hypothesis, but not complete – education and income still affecting participation.</li><li>• Bridge to extra-representative politics/participation.</li><li>• Possibility of appearance (and appointment) of new leaders.</li></ul> | <p><b>ICT Mediation Structures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Other intermediaries (small media outlets, civic movements in the margins, etc.) can amplify specific voices that, because they were marginal, they would not have raised the attention of major organizations or intermediaries – the long tail of technopolitics and ICT-mediated participation.</li></ul> |
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## ***Decidim.barcelona* Project Websites**

Technical specifications of the participation platform (draft):

<https://www.gitbook.com/book/andreslucena/specs-pam/details>

Prototype of the platform:

<https://app.moqups.com/andreslucena@gmail.com/Gr5IS78SVN/view/page/a1cb9ea14>

Instal·lació alfa de la plataforma:

<http://barcelona-participa.herokuapp.com>

Ajuntament de Barcelona repository on GitHub of the *decidim.barcelona* platform:

<https://github.com/AjuntamentdeBarcelona/barcelona-participa/>

Madrid version of participatory government: *Decide Madrid*:

<https://decide.madrid.es>

Barcelona Open Government portal:

<http://governobert.bcn.cat/>

Barcelona Transparency portal:

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

Barcelona Open Data portal:

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

# Shifting participation into sovereignty: the case of *decidim.barcelona*

Ismael Peña-López

Citizen participation is entering a new era: the era of technopolitics. New forms of organization, of coordination, of civic action boosted by a new ethics and new methodologies, and all this made possible by new tools, spaces and actors.

However, this new era of citizen empowerment continues to require –probably more than ever– democratic institutions that are especially responsive to the changes that are taking place on the streets. Institutions that adapt, that innovate and that, ultimately, transform themselves to keep on being a chain of transmission between the will of citizens and collective decision-making.

This volume analyses how the City Council of Barcelona has faced and planned this transformation, and the impacts that the new strategy may imply on meanings, norms and power in the Administration-citizen relationship. It assumes a new game board, although the final outcome of the game is still uncertain.



**HUYGENS**  
EDITORIAL

ISBN 978-84-17580-07-0



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