Incorporating immigrant voices? Formal access to participatory mechanisms in the city of Barcelona

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Abstract

Democratic innovations to enhance the participation of city-zens in urban settings have advanced in the world in the last decades. Avenues such as citizens' assemblies, deliberative polls, participatory budgeting, e-petitions and online consultations have become part of the repertoire of participation available to urban residents. However, a pending question is whether local authorities envision specific strategies to incorporate urban residents with immigrant background in such processes. Our paper tries to explore this question by providing an overview at the intersection between the literature on citizen participation and the political participation of immigrants in local settings. It focuses on the external and more formal dimension of citizen participation by looking at how Barcelona includes immigrant voices in the policy-making process. Barcelona is a paradigmatic case in Southern Europe. It has become an example of practices to include its residents in decision-making processes, as it has witnessed an exceptionally rapid demographic transformation due to international migration. Our paper concludes by highlighting the positive implications of having a local framework that favours the inclusion of immigrants in participatory mechanisms. It also makes an appeal for further studies looking into the internal dynamics of participation within these mechanisms.

Preface

The mandate of the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is to contribute to poverty reduction by promoting local democracy in low and middle-income countries. In order to fulfil this mandate, we promote and encourage decentralised cooperation through our municipal partnership programme, capacity building through our international training programmes, and exchange of knowledge through our Knowledge Centre. ICLD documents and publishes key lessons learned from our ongoing activities, initiates and funds relevant research, engages in scholarly networks, connecting relevant researcher with practitioners and organizes conferences and workshops. We also maintain a publications series.

This working paper, "Incorporating immigrant voices? Formal access to participatory mechanisms in the city of Barcelona", by Vicent Climent-Ferrando and Juan Carlos Triviño-Salazar was part of a research project discussed at ICLD's Local Democracy Academy in Umeå (2019). This paper discusses the role of local governments to promote the inclusion of immigrants through participatory mechanisms. The case of Barcelona has been emblematic for having a unique approach to the inclusion of immigrants and provides inspiration and hope in times of polarisation and closed borders. While the authors show that policies for participatory democracy are not enough to achieve meaningful political representation, having key policies in place is an important first step. An example of this enabling policy environment is Barcelona's 2010 Immigration Plan cited in this working paper which states that "People of foreign origin residing in the city should have the opportunity to develop as political and social agents. We must work for the inclusion of all forms of diversity in networks of existing citizen participation". Thus, we hope this working paper provides new knowledge for local governments and researchers interested in alternative avenues to enhance citizen dialogue and local democracy for all.

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Introduction

Neighbours join forces in their demands to local authorities to renovate a park, improve waste removal or request more police officers. We have seen cities organizing participatory mechanisms to channel such demands and make residents participants in the decision-making process through citizens' assemblies, deliberative polls, participatory budgeting, e-petitions and online consultations (Su, 2017). In this context, making political institutions more responsive by including all residents, especially those social groups with a minimal involvement in the political system, seems to be the goal. Immigrants, as a social group traditionally holding a marginal position in the political and policy processes in receiving societies (Bloemraad and Schönwälder, 2013) are one target in these mechanisms at the local level (Sintomer and De Maillard, 2007; Sacco, 2012). Focusing on immigrants is highly relevant as their political integration is central to "the process of becoming an accepted part of society" (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). Moreover, participatory mechanisms can become an alternative to representative ones for those migrants with a restricted access to electoral politics due to their legal status.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this article is to look into the different ways local authorities envision and formally incorporate urban residents with immigrant backgrounds into participatory mechanisms opened for their city-zens. We operationalise this aim by looking at the city of Barcelona's approach to citizen participation and the formal inclusion of immigrant voices in them. Barcelona constitutes a paradigmatic case in Southern Europe as it has gained notoriety due to its political positioning on immigrant integration and refugee reception in international arenas (Triviño-Salazar, 2020). Within the Spanish context, the city has coupled important and recent demographic changes derived from international migrations with innovative social policies related to citizen participation in the policy-making process (Bazurli, 2019; Peña-López, 2019).

This approach to citizen participation in Barcelona is not only due to current international migration patterns. It is a city with a long tradition of progressive social policies and citizen participation. The spread of participatory practices as a pivotal element in the governance of the city is not new and must be analysed within the broader decentralization process which occurred in Spain in the transition towards democracy and the decentralization process in the late 70's/early 80's. During this period, and following the devolution of power to the regions, the city of Barcelona struggled to assert itself at a sub-national and sub-regional level of government. Over the past decades, reference to the active involvement of citizens in the policy making of the city has ranked high on the city's political agenda (Blanco, 2015; Godàs & Gomà, 2008).

We define political participation as those activities aimed "at influencing the government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of policies or indirectly by affecting the selection of people who make those policies" (Verba et al. 1995, 35). When it comes to participatory mechanisms, we define them as innovative democratic tools seeking to establish a horizontal relationship between local governments and citizens as the latter are directly involved in decision-making processes (Gaventa, 2004). Through these mechanisms, urban residents have a more direct say (compared to representative venues) in decisions affecting the territories where they live and communities (c.f. Touchton et al. 2019).

The implementation of such mechanisms at the local level has been territorially located in city districts or neighbourhoods as they constitute arenas of proximity where urban residents mobilise claims and make visible their needs (Sintomer and De Maillard, 2007). It is at these levels where immigrants may start getting politically engaged as they constitute "microcosms at the epicentre of larger problems" (Body-Gendrot and Martiniello 2000: 2). However, new democratic innovations do not only rely on face-to-face meetings occurring at these levels but also occur through digital mechanisms of participation (Touchton et al. 2019). In this sense, e-avenues of participation may give access to information as well as encouraging the participation of larger numbers of urban residents in policy-making spheres.

The question of how immigrants get involved in participatory processes is an under-researched topic in the literature on political participation of immigrants (Bloemraad and Schönwälder, 2013: 567) but also in the literature referring to citizen's participation. By focusing on the participation of immigrants in Barcelona through mechanisms of citizen participation, we aim to respond the following question: to what extent do institutions incorporate immigrant voices into the city's democratic innovations? How are immigrants formally embedded in the city's participation mechanisms? How can the policymaking process become more inclusive, especially in a city where almost one third of the population is of immigrant origin?

Vicent Climent Ferrando showing a model of Barcelona to a diverse audience of listeners
Vicent Climent-Ferrando

Building a theoretical framework

The crisis of representative democracy has compelled the state "to construct new kinds of relationships between ordinary people and institutions which affect their lives" (Gaventa, 2004: 25). Democratic innovations based on citizen participation have gained importance over the last three decades as political institutions seek to become more responsive to citizens' claims (Ramírez-Viveros, 2014, Triviño-Salazar, 2013). The appearance of such innovations has taken an overwhelmingly local character as local governments around the world have incorporated different mechanisms of consultation and deliberation (Fung and Wright, 2001; Nabatchi et al. 2012; Font et al. 2014; Fung, 2015). The basic aim for local governments is to collectively define policy content that is proximate to the residents (Ganuza and Francés, 2012). Moreover, local governments may expect to "deepen the quality of democracy by including marginalized voices, expanding public debate, and distributing resources to underserviced neighbourhoods" (Touchton et al. 2019: 155).

As previously mentioned, these mechanisms can take multiple forms and they can be done through face-to-face or digital formats or a combination of both (Pateman, 2012; Fung, 2015; Touchton et al. 2019). There are two main challenges for these participatory mechanisms: 1) to include as many citizens as possible and 2) to have a large diversity of opinions within them (Knight and Johnson, 1994; Dryzeck, 2007; Smith, 2009). Participatory mechanisms can become an opportunity of participation for certain urban residents, such as immigrants, who are often politically disengaged due to disaffection with the political system, political illiteracy and obstacles in the access to electoral rights.

Immigrant participation in local politics has been subject to scholarly interest for over three decades. These studies have been mainly devoted to conventional forms of participation often connected to electoral politics – such as voting, standing as candidates in elections or joining political parties (see Garbaye 2005; Michon and Vermeulen 2013; Janssen et al. 2020; Cordero et al. 2021), and civic-based organisations –immigrant-based or mainstream (Cordero-Guzmán, 2005;

Myrberg, 2010; Climent-Ferrando and Triviño-Salazar, 2015; de Grauuw, 2016; de Grauuw et al., 2016; Pilatti and Morales, 2019; Triviño-Salazar, 2020; Castañeda, 2020; Giugni and Grasso, 2020). The literature has also referred to the participation of immigrants through non-conventional forms such as protests, demonstrations, petitions and social media mobilization in local settings (see Nicholls and Uitemark 2013, Cappiali 2016; Bloemraad and Voss, 2020).

To a much lesser extent, certain scholars have also focused on consultative politics, a conventional avenue which is closer to the participatory mechanisms for residents we are interested in. Consultative politics take the form of advisory councils, with no binding power which are composed by immigrant leaders and other local stakeholders to exclusively discuss issues pertaining immigrant-origin minorities (Güntner, 2013). These instruments first emerged in Brussels and Wallonia in the 1960s with the aim to consult immigrant representatives on decisions to be taken or applied locally (Martiniello and Hilly, 1998). They spread then across European cities and became an instrument of dialogue between immigrants and local authorities (Chaib 2004).

The studies identify two main factors that facilitate or constrain participation: first, the institutional design of these spaces, which may create incentives for wider participation (Takle 2017); second, the role of political leaderships which may impinge dynamism to the participation (Chaib, 2004). Despite the interest in these bodies, scholars agree that consultation exercises with immigrants might be another tactic of elitist governance if they are not part of mainstream decision-making or if they emerge in an ad-hoc manner with opportunistic interests (Güntner, 2013).

The participation of immigrants in local participatory mechanisms available to all urban residents has been an understudied topic. Truly little has been said about their participation in local initiatives that do not reify their ethnicity or group characteristics as it happens in consultative instruments as the ones previously described. The studies by Sacco (2012) and Hayduk et al. (2017) are two of the few ones trying to overcome this

limitation. The former focuses on the participation of immigrant associations in the District Contracts in Brussels, which were participatory mechanisms opened by local authorities to empower residents while renovating deprived neighbourhoods. Results showed that despite these Contracts being in neighbourhoods with high immigration, immigrant leaders did not participate enough as local authorities exerted exclusionary practices that marginalised these groups. Moreover, failures in the institutional design of such spaces of participation contributed to the disengagement of these leaders.

The latter study focuses on the experience of New York City with participatory budgeting. It reveals that immigrants engage with this participatory mechanism thanks to a complex mix of promising practices that contributes to the participatory budgeting's aims of inclusion and quality. In this study, the authors uncovered that caring for logistical but also emotional matters is highly relevant in promoting the participation of immigrants in these spaces. The article points at traditional barriers impeding full participation such as language, immigrant status or socioeconomic status. However, it also shows that creating safe spaces through trust relationships with community leaders may change immigrants' initial reluctance to participate.

Both studies focused on the representation of immigrants in these spaces through immigrant leaders located in deprived neighbourhoods. We believe it is necessary to move beyond this research scope to include all immigrant participants – even those who are part of these spaces on an individual basis – in participatory mechanisms addressed to all residents regardless of origin and implemented to ensure participation of all in local decision-making processes. We also deem necessary to expand the empirical focus to include other settings which may offer different institutional arrangements in the design and implementation of such spaces as well as face-to-face and digital venues.

All in all, scholars in the field of participatory democracy have been particularly keen on looking at the quality of citizens' participation in decision-making

mechanisms. They assume that the better the quality of such mechanisms, the more responsive and democratic they will be to the citizens in general. To achieve such quality, scholars point at different elements such as (1) offering equal opportunities to participate, (2) including residents in a way that mirrors the overall population, (3) providing participants with accurate information, (4) offering transparency in the participatory process, and (5) implementing administrative efficiency to transmit the proposals debated by the citizens to public authorities (Wampler and Avritzer, 2005; Smith, 2009; Baiocchi et al. 2020).

For the previously mentioned elements to exist, the institutional framework around these spaces as well as the resulting design has important implications on the quality of the participation. Municipalities define the margins of these mechanisms as they are responsible for their organization and for encouraging citizens' presence (Sacco, 2012). In fact, different studies on citizen participation through democratic innovation identify an external and internal dimension affecting the quality of the participation (Ganuza and Francés, 2012; Pateman, 2012; García-Espín and Ganuza, 2017).

The external dimension refers to those elements that construct the environment where these mechanisms emerge. Placing a democratic innovation in public consciousness requires important work in removing institutional obstacles channelling residents towards these spaces (Coleman and Cardoso, 2017). In this external dimension, the role of local authorities and bureaucracies is central in the implementation of such mechanisms. Here we refer to the legal framework sustaining their existence; the local policy framework informing their design, their declared aims, target populations and channels to influence policies.

As for the internal dimension, Baiocchi and Ganuza (2014) refer to the issues of who participates, how frequent is this participation and which obstacles may prevent such participation from occurring. According to Coleman and Cardoso (2017), "a fundamental prerequisite of any form of effective representation is that the represented are able to contribute to the democratic process without encountering barriers." In this sense,

the way participation is carried out within these spaces may have important implications for their democratic function. This is especially relevant when referring to how discussion occurs, how inclusive discussions are, who speaks, who decides and what language is used, among other elements. This internal dimension also includes the quality of the decisions and how free participants are to open the debate or discuss the rules governing discussions.

Our research is particularly interested in describing the external dimension in the case of Barcelona. Focusing on this dimension refers looking into the political environment where they emerge but also the different channels opened. By doing so, we can map the existing participatory mechanisms, the inclusion of immigrants in them, their evolution and the factors behind this evolution. We base our analysis on looking at the evolution of citizen participation in the city of Barcelona in the last decades, with a special focus on the last 6 years (since 2015) when the radical left political platform Barcelona in Common (In Catalan: Barcelona en Commú – BeC) came into power. To do so, we provide a descriptive account of the participatory landscape of the city and how immigrants are incorporated into them. Our analysis is based on the policy documents such as strategic plans and local ordinances, royal decrees and council decisions as well as reports and scholarly articles related to the participatory mechanisms in the city.

Barcelona, immigrant diversity and the Spanish context

The highly-decentralized Spanish system has meant the devolution of competencies in areas that directly affect the reception and integration of immigrants. In fact, the national level has increasingly promoted local responses to the challenges presented by the arrival of immigrants into the country (Aragón Medina et al. 2009). Spain allocates to regions (so-called Autonomous Communities) and municipalities the formulation and implementation of policies that affect their residents, including migrants. In this context, Barcelona pioneered as the first city in Spain to incorporate responses to the presence of newcomers in its policy agenda responses. (Bazurli, 2019).

Barcelona started to highlight the relevance of cities in reception and integration when the number of foreigners amounted to fewer than 2% of the city's population, in the mid-1990s. The city vision in this regard proved to be prescient, as a rapid increase in immigration transformed it into a destination city in Southern Europe; by 2018, 24% of residents were foreign-born. The economic boom experienced by Spain in the 2000s and the local bonanza brought by the 1992 Olympic games became strong pull factors for migrants coming from all over the world.

The relationship of Barcelona with immigrant integration policymaking has been one of innovation in the last three decades (Bazurli, 2019). The city's bold and transformative agenda in this regard made it stand out in the national and European contexts. Such an approach has been favoured by the policy continuity provided by its governments since the return to democracy in 1978. Until 2011, the city was a stronghold of the centre-left Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSC). In 2011, the centre-right Catalan nationalist of Convergència i Unió led the local government; however, such change did not affect the continuity in the policies on immigrant integration implemented until then. In 2015, a radical left political platform under the name Barcelona en Comú [Barcelona in Common (BeC) and led by the housing activist Ada Colau won the elections and led the government.

Successive local governments in the city considered immigrant integration "as a 'natural' process that will emerge from immigrants' equal access to all social welfare services, which are based on the same principles and requirements [as] for pre-existing residents" (Morales and Jorba, 2010: 272), a principle of normalisation. Such principle can be understood as one based on a mainstreaming approach for inclusion where services and actions reach immigrants and their offspring through needs-based social policies that also focus on all citizens (Scholten et al. 2017). Zapata-Barrero (2017: 249) links such principle to the city's decision "…to build its own mainstreaming approach towards interculturalism, while also strengthening its 'differentiated way' as the capital of Catalonia, within Spain." Interculturalism has meant adopting a (cultural) diversity lens in the policymaking of actions for all the residents, especially those which may need more resources to be in equal footing as the rest (i.e., immigrants) (Zapata-Barrero, 2017). So, in this regard, Barcelona has mainly opted for generic policies that include diversity as a core element in them.

The guiding principle behind the city's approach towards immigrant reception and integration has been repeatedly expressed through consecutive policy plans aiming at presenting the city vision and its implementation. The first plan was released in 1997 as the Municipal Plan for Interculturality. The policy document was quite innovative as numbers of migrants back then were low. This plan was followed by the 2002-2008 Municipal Plan for Immigration, the 2008-2011 Working Plan on Immigration, the 2010 Barcelona Interculturality Plan, the 2012-2015 Working Plan on Immigration, and the 2018-2021 Citizenship and Immigration Plan of the city of Barcelona.

Its policy entrepreneurship translated into the opening in 1989 of the Care Service for Immigrants, Emigrants, and Refugees (the so-called SAIER, Servei d'Atenció a Immigrants, Emigrants i Refugiats), a one-stop shop which coordinates a set of city social services offered to immigrants (Castañeda, 2018). Through the years, the city has built a network of pro-immigrant and immigrant-based organizations that contribute in the service delivery of language or training courses, legal advice, and housing (Però 2007; Aragón Medina et al. 2009; Zapata-Barrero 2017; Bazurli 2019). Further-

more, the local government has invested in funding immigrant-led cultural events and initiatives. In this context, looking at the construction of citizen participation in the city is highly relevant as it shows how Barcelona has mainstreamed the participation of immigrants into the general channels opened to all the residents.

Citizen participation and the Barcelona model through time

Consolidating citizen participation

Throughout the years, Barcelona has tried to build an inclusive model where local residents could participate in various decision-making processes (Blanco, 2015). The so-called 'Barcelona Model' is based on opening spaces for local actors to intervene in decision-making processes steered by local state actors. The aim is to take decisions affecting the city's residents in a consensus-building environment. Through this approach the local government promoted socio-economic policies where civil society actors such as advocacy groups and NGOs were involved in service provision (Eizaguirre et al., 2017). This model was nurtured from the efforts mainly done in the 1980s and 1990s to shape a Barcelona version of the 'new localism' where the search for local answers aimed to make the city more competitive and attractive to business and investment, especially in the context of the preparations for the Olympic games of 1992. The model included an internationalisation strategy placed under the idea of 'international municipalism' or the need for the city to shape its own voice and identity in the international arena by becoming actively involved in international fora and networks such as the Eurocities Network, the International Observatory on Participative Democracy (IOPD) or the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), to name only a few.

The Barcelona model was built on two pillars: decentralisation and citizen participation. These were seen not only as key elements in constructing local democracy but also as a response to the long historical demands of social movements that had been repressed during the Franco dictatorship in Spain. In sum, decentralisation and citizen participation had a dual purpose: decentralisation was a political tool to democratise local government whereas citizen participation aimed at fostering local democracy y involving citizens in the process of governing (Blakeley, 2005).

The first steps towards both decentralization and citizen participation processes in Barcelona started as early as 1980's. The city was divided into ten districts and 73 neighbourhoods.[1] Historically, Barcelona has been portrayed as a 'city of neighbourhoods' (Russo, 2016: 7) and has always promoted an associational life at neighbourhood level. Neighbourhood associations initially facilitated the politicisation of citizens by making them an active part of the development in the context where they lived. Reference to the active involvement of citizens in the policy making of the city already ranked high in the political arena. As highlighted by Eizaguirre et al. (2017), during the first democratically-elected local governments, the city combined redistributive socio-economic programmes in which local residents could participate in the planning as well as the implementation via local non-state actors. The objective was to produce economic growth while strengthening social cohesion.

The participation of local actors in the local governance of social policies strengthened urban citizenship and a city identity (Blanco et al. 2020). In 1986, the Regulatory Norms of Citizen Participation[2] were approved, which represented a landmark as they were highly innovative norms that encouraged citizens to participate by creating different mechanisms for associations and citizens alike such as the Association Councils, the Neighbourhood Entities, Sectoral Councils, City Councils and the Suggestions and Initiatives Services.

These Norms were amended in 2002 to introduce

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1 The current local administrative division was finalized in 2006

2 For a full account of these norms, please visit the Barcelona Official Journal, available here https://bcnroc.ajuntament.barcelona.cat/jspui/bitstream/11703/106506/1/NPartCiutadana_1986.pdf

three new elements:[3] (1) a new legal framework based on the 1986 Charter that reinforced the decentralization process, strengthened the city's self-government and improved the mechanisms for citizen participation by stimulating cooperation between the City Council, the social fabric and social agents[4]. (2) A reference to the wider European context as it made an explicit reference to the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City. The Charter was the result of a preparatory process initiated in Barcelona in 1998 after the Conference "Cities for Human Rights", in which direct citizen participation was a key issue. Hundreds of Mayors participated in the event and called for stronger political acknowledgement of cities as key actors in safeguarding human rights and involving citizens in more direct participation. Participating cities adopted the "Barcelona Commitment", which defined a roadmap aimed at drafting a political document that fostered the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights at local level in Europe. Finally, (3), a local commitment towards consolidating and actively using the existing mechanisms of participation.

These ideas were further developed in the Barcelona Charter of Rights and Duties[5], approved in 2010, which advocated for the need to foster a participatory democracy and not just a representative democracy. The Charter consolidated the participatory approach by inserting it as a strategic element aimed at involving citizens in the decision-making process of the city.

A change in paradigm in citizen participation

2015 witnessed a change in paradigm in participatory democracy in the city as it established a renewed framework for citizen participation. This shift towards making participation a key strategy of the city responded to three factors: firstly, the loss of confidence in the Spanish institutions witnessed an outburst in 2011 of the so-called Indignados Movement as a consequence of the financial crisis, housing prices, high unemployment, corruption, and an overwhelming sense of lack

of political legitimacy of the institutions (Blanco et al. 2020). The Movement renewed the interest in political participation as participatory mechanisms based on horizontal and deliberative processes were established in occupied central squares around the country (Eizaguirre, et al. 2017). As pointed out by Peña-López, "one of the clearest demands of the movement was the improvement of democratic processes and institutions, especially by increasing transparency, accountability and participation" (2017:2).

Secondly, the electoral victory in May 2015 of BeC – a new political party born out of the Indignados protests – sparked a radical shift in the agenda, with an even stronger focus on participation, social inclusion and local empowerment. As defined by Eizaguirre et al. (2017), the aim to strengthen political rights through citizen participation and promote changes in the hegemonic economic model was at the centre of their actions. Thirdly, the socio-political changes in the city made the latest regulation – the 2002 Norms – outdated and no longer representative of the social context. Cid & Gomà (2016) identified four dimensions in these local political changes: (a) enhancing the channels of public control, citizen participation, and public–community co-production of public policies, (b) placing social rescue, social inclusion, and the reconstruction of basic social rights at the heart of public action priorities, (c) co-developing the sustainable habitability agenda, promoting more sustainable mobility, and strengthening the commitment to renewable energies; and (d) reasserting public leadership in the field of urban economy and containing the influence of the private sector in economic governance.

This new turn takes the politics of participation into another realm, moving from just "listening" to citizens to "giving them an active voice". The creation and centrality of the participatory platform decidim.barcelona (We decide. Barcelona) illustrates this new approach. As pointed out by Peña-López (2019), citizens are truly

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3   For a full account of the 2002 Norms, see https://bcnroc.ajuntament.barcelona.cat/jspui/bitstream/11703/84850/1/5568.pdf

4   Llei 22/1998, de 30 de desembre, de la Carta municipal de Barcelona. Available at https://w9.bcn.cat/Ajuntament/Documents/CartaMunicipal/CMB%20text%20consolidat.pdf

5   Charter available at https://bcnroc.ajuntament.barcelona.cat/jspui/bitstream/11703/89720/3/7141.pdf

at the core of participation as they are invited to design and improve upon the participatory process. They are invited to contribute with proposals that will be discussed and potentially translate into real measures and binding legislation (provided some technical and social thresholds are reached). Citizens are also empowered to monitor and assess both the process in its procedures as in its outcomes.

The City Council of Barcelona defines the goals of the participative process of decidim.barcelona thus:

• To elaborate the Municipality's Strategy Plan (PAM) and the Districts' Action Plan (PAD) with the active participation of citizens, in an open, transparent and networked fashion.

• To give a leading voice to the citizens of Barcelona.

• To give a voice to the city's neighborhoods so that Barcelona becomes the city of neighborhoods 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.

The city introduced information and communication technologies (ICT) at the service of citizen participation. The creation of an ICT-assisted decision-mak-

ing platform called decidim.Barcelona represented a quantum leap in transparency, accountability and participation in the city's decision-making processes as it became a key instrument for deliberation and openness. Decidim.Barcelona began as a local ICT project, aimed at giving support to the participatory meetings, but soon became an innovative tool acclaimed worldwide. The 2016-2019 Barcelona Municipal Plan was conceived and approved through the decidim.barcelona platform as well as the 2020-2023 Municipal Plan or the first-ever City Participatory Budgets (2020). Today, the decidim.barcelona software is being used by more than 500 entities around the world, from cities such as Helsinki, Veracruz, Nanterre, or Valencia, regional governments such as Quebec or Catalonia or International Organizations such as the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (IOPD), to name only a few.[6]

As pointed out by Peña-Lopez (2019), 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, legitimated and accepted to be part of the strategic plan of the municipality. There has been an increase in pluralism without damaging the existing social capital. New recreational areas, parks, and pedestrian zones are some of the concrete measures in favour of which the citizens of Barcelona − irrespective of country of origin − have voted.[7]

These novel ways of exercising local participation were embedded in the Citizen Participation Regulation[8] of 2017. The new legal framework set out the current participation channels and necessary resources aimed at empowering even more citizens and their influence on political decisions at local level. The aim was to regulate the hybrid participation mechanisms between digital and

6 For more information, please read the 2016-2019 Assessment Report, available here https://media-edg.barcelona.cat/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/02185426/Informe_Decidim_20191.pdf

7 For a full account of all ongoing project, visit the Decidim Barcelona Participatory Budgeting website. https://www.decidim.barcelona/processes/PressupostosParticipatius/f/4517/budgets/5/projects

8 Reglament de Participació Ciutadana del 2017. Available https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/participaciociutadana/sites/default/files/documents/reglament_participacio_catala.pdf

face-to-face participation. The 2017 Regulation clearly states that new form of e-participation(decidim-barcelona) does not replace person to person engaging in local politics through spaces such as the District Councils, Neighbourhood Councils, Public Audiences or the Sectoral meetings (Culture, LGTBI, Education, Feminism, etc.). Rather, it complements and expands participation through new ICT-mediated mechanisms. It therefore adds a new dimension to the traditional ways of citizen participation on local politics.

More specifically, the 2017 Regulation sets four face-to-face participation channels, all of which are complemented by the decidim.Barcelona platform:

1) Citizen initiatives: Aimed at promoting a certain action of general interest and municipal competence by the City Council through the collection of signatures of Barcelona residents

2) Participation bodies: Spaces for regular meeting between the citizens and the City Council to discuss and collect, their opinions and proposals on municipal actions. These bodies are the City Council, the District Councils, the District Audiences, the Neighbourhood Councils and the sectorial councils.

3) Participation processes: Channels used by local residents to discuss proposals regarding a specific municipal action. The decisions taken through these processes become the basis for subsequent municipal actions.

4) Citizen consultations: The municipal government requests the citizens' opinion through direct voting.

Sant Pau Modernist Building
Juan Carlos Triviño Salazar

Barcelona and citizen participation through an immigrant lens

In Spain, immigrants have restricted access to electoral and parliamentary politics as voting is only limited to EU citizens or nationals from 14 non-EU countries in municipal elections. To compensate for the restrictive electoral and parliamentary avenues, Spanish municipalities have promoted the political participation of immigrants mainly through two channels: consultative politics and civic organizations (i.e., immigrant-based or mainstream)[9] (Miret 2011). Although municipalities cannot change the pre-established legal framework, they can design and implement policies promoting the above-mentioned avenues. This situation may lead to differences in the type and depth of policies among cities.

In this regard, Barcelona innovated by creating new spaces to encourage the participation of immigrants into city structures., The city created in 1998 the Barcelona Municipal Council of Immigration (CMIB) as a channel to incorporate the voices of migrants into the city's policies. This council, which still exists today, is a central component in the way migrants can voice their claims and aspirations before the city administration as well as shape policies related to their presence. This body has a consultative character, and it is formed by representatives from the local government as well as 72 organizations representing immigrants (i.e., immigrant-based organizations), working with immigrants (e.g., pro-immigrant NGOs) or wishing to accommodate the presence of immigrant diversity into city activities (e.g., business organizations). They play an important role in drafting the immigration and integration plans released by the city every three years.

Additionally, Barcelona started investing in policies promoting the participation of immigrants through civic organizations in the 1990s with the idea of normalizing their voice in the public debate. The city offers two prime examples of such collaborations between the local government and civic organizations.

As stated above, the first one is the creation of the SAI-ER in 1989. This one-shop office opened to all migrant residents living in the city is based on the work of city officials and representatives from five organizations working on service-delivery in immigrant reception and integration: the trade unions' sponsored immigrant organizations AMIC-UGT and CITE, the Red Cross, the Barcelona Bar Association and the Consortium for the Linguistic Normalization (CPNL).

Another relevant example is the working relationship established between the municipal government and local NGOs and associations working on refugee reception in the post-2015 European Refugee Crisis. In this regard, these organizations are consulted on the city strategy around the protection of those individuals seeking for refuge (Triviño-Salazar, 2021).

Although the city created these immigrant-specific channels of participation, they have helped to energize the political involvement of immigrants into participatory mechanisms for the general population. In this regard, the CMIB, immigrant-based organisations and immigrant leaderships at the neighbourhood level have become important elements in the approach to promote the participation of residents with immigrant background into mainstreamed spaces. In fact, different policy documents such as the Barcelona migration plans, adopted in 1997, already mentioned the importance of normalizing the participation of immigrants in the 'participatory web' of the city. To illustrate this point, the 2010 Immigration Plan summarized the city strategy as follows:

> "And another area that is becoming essential for a true integration process to take place is that of full citizen participation. People of foreign origin residing in the city should have the opportunity to develop as political and social agents. We must work for the inclusion of all forms of diversity in networks of existing citizen participation" (p.35)

Despite the good intention to promote the participation of immigrants into the mainstream decision-mak-

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9   The law also allows the participation of immigrants in political parties, unions and pressure groups (Però 2007; Gabrielli et al. 2017).

ing spaces of the city throughout the tenure of the different governments it is not until 2015 with the arrival of the government led by BeC, that we see growing concern not only about using a language of participation but also about ways to implement it. In fact, the 2017 Regulation for Citizen Participation acknowledges the existence of diversity in the city and directly asks the local government to place all the means necessary to make participation as inclusive as possible in all the channels mentioned in the previous section. In this regard, the government takes a step further by approving a "Government measure for encouraging the participation of people from diverse cultural backgrounds and contexts in the channels of participation"[10].

This measure becomes the clearest effort not only to mainstream but also to promote the participation of immigrants within the change of the participatory paradigm in the city. It was the outcome of a working group formed in 2016 by experts on diversity, civic leaders representing cultural and religious organizations and by municipal offices. This group extensively discussed the creation of guidelines to substantively incorporate citizens of immigrant background into the strategy of citizen participation put forward by the city.

Following this line of action, relevant documents such as the 2018-2021 Immigration Plan place the promotion of immigrant participation in participatory mechanisms at the core of the debates. In this regard, the idea was that immigrants should firstly participate in their neighbourhoods as the latter were the most immediate of their aspirations and claims. In fact, the second axis of the Immigration Plan asks for measures that promote the participation of all citizens, immigrants included, into decision-making spaces in the city. For this they point at the need to empower immigrants and refugees.

The formal framework and the documents outlined above encountered, however, practical obstacles to their implementation. By looking at the webpage de-

cidim.barcelona, it is possible to find several government initiatives to boost services aimed at the immigrant population of the city. However, and despite these efforts, the webpage is not easily accessible for those residents who do not speak Spanish or Catalan as these are the two languages used in it, the two official languages in Barcelona, it should be said.

In an informal interview, a municipal officer in charge of citizen participation mentioned how the city had made an effort to enhance participation of the immigrant population by including many more languages in the communication at the neighbourhood level. For instance, in the densely populated and diverse neighbourhood of El Raval, banners announcing neighbourhood councils are often written in Catalan and/or Spanish but also in Arabic, Tagalog and Urdu, which are the main languages spoken in those neighbourhoods. Internal debates among municipal officers are currently ongoing on whether this represents a positive mechanism to encourage these residents to participate in the decision-making processes of the city.

Following the 2017 Regulation, the City of Barcelona published a comprehensive Evaluation Report handbook[11] setting out guidelines on how to assess the impact of these new channels and forms of participation. The Guide contains four evaluation items that constitute the analytical framework designed to evaluate participatory processes in Barcelona:

1. Design and Planning, aimed at measuring whether the 2017 Regulation fulfills the task it was conceived for.

2. Plurality and Diversity, designed to analyze two main aspects:

   • Plurality: the inclusion of multiple positionings/voices vis-à-vis the participatory process

   • Diversity: looks at the people's profiles in the participatory process. This item is divided into four categories: gender, age, functional diversity or cultural origin.

10   City of Barcelona. 2018. Mesura de Govern per al foment de la participació de persones d'orígens i contextos culturals diversos en els canals de participació. Available at: https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/educacio/sites/default/files/mgfparticipacio_3.pdf

11   Sistema de Seguiment i Avaluació del programa Democràcia Activa. Manual d'Ús [Handbook on Monitoring and Evaluation of the Democràcia Activa Programme] Available at https://bcnroc.ajuntament.barcelona.cat/jspui/bitstream/11703/115389/1/190517%20Manual%20d'%C3%BAs%20actualitzat.pdf

3. Traceability and transparency:

• Traceability: refers to the possibility to connect the information generated all along the participatory process

• Transparency: analyses the access to information and good governance

4. Accessibility: geared towards ensuring that all citizens have access to participatory mechanisms as well as the documents derived from them.

The evaluation of immigrant participation in the city's participatory processes is included under the rubric "plurality and diversity", along with issues related to gender, functional diversity and age range. The first assessment report on the evaluation of these programmes was published in 2019.[12] The report provides a detailed assessment on how effective these new forms of participation are, including the participation of migrants inthe city's participatory processes and channels.

The report overtly acknowledges that "the gathering of information regarding cultural diversity represents a challenge both conceptually and methodologically" and concludes that "the proportion of people of cultural origin [participating in these processes] is far from representing the diversity present in the city… It does not even reach 5% in the majority of participatory processes". Among the possible reasons for this remarkably low participation of immigrants into these new city platforms could be lack of real multilingual communication, lack of Internet skills to use the decidim.barcelona platform, and little/no culture of participation. These first empirical results show that it is imperative not only to map the existing participatory mechanisms, but also to assess and evaluate the manner in which immigrant voices are incorporated into these spaces.

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12 Avaluació del Programa de Democràcia Activa. Informe de Resultats, 2019. [Evaluating the Democràcia Activa Programme. Results 2019]. Available at https://bcnroc.ajuntament.barcelona.cat/jspui/bitstream/11703/115384/1/2019-04-19%20Informe%20d%27Avaluaci%C3%B3%20DA.pdf

Concluding remarks

Cities are increasingly becoming a central democratic arena where decisions based on substantive participation, but also practical considerations take place. This situation is coupled with dynamic and changing demographic realities that make cities much more diverse and responding to residents with different sets of claims and aspirations depending on their cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. By opening spaces of citizen participation, different mechanisms can offer a wide range of options so urban residents can exert their city-zenship based on the politics of place and presence. In this context, including immigrants in these mechanisms seeks to fulfil the normative principles of inclusion but also the pragmatic one of responsiveness. The case of Barcelona illustrates, at least from a formal perspective, the construction of a participatory infrastructure where all its residents can become part of the political and policy-making arenas.

Our exploratory study indicates that immigrants can gain leverage in the political process depending on the openness or closedness of institutional contexts who support their activism and their claims. The preliminary description of the channels opened in the city of Barcelona and how they are inserted in the reality of a highly diverse city show that the city has made a constant effort to incorporate the voices of migrants into the city's policy-making processes, as overtly stated in the Barcelona 2010 Immigration Plan cited above: People of foreign origin residing in the city should have the opportunity to develop as political and social agents. We must work for the inclusion of all forms of diversity in networks of existing citizen participation" (p.35)

Our study has also highlighted the need to dig deeper into this aspect. Looking at citizen participation through an immigrant lens goes to the heart of guaranteeing the 'right to the city' that Henri Lefevre coined in his famous book in 1968. In their seminal article on the political participation of immigrants, Bloemraad and Schönwälder (2013) pointed at the state of the literature. Several years later, it is still evident the need to go beyond immigrant-related arenas to one where immigrants are inserted into generalist local institutions beyond representative politics. The case of Barcelona shows a reality that needs further research: less than 5% of the immigrants make real use of the existing participation channels, in a city with 24% of the population are foreign-born This situation from an academic and policy perspectives shows that research must be conducted to assess and evaluate the true effectiveness of these participation channels to find out how local institutions can become inclusive in descriptive and substantive terms for all the local residents.

Future steps in our research are to focus more strongly on the internal dimension we uncovered in our theoretical section. This way we can look into the dynamics that create the conditions for inclusive spaces. Looking into who participates, how and the strengths and weaknesses of such mechanisms can indicate how urban residents are heard and how they exert their agency. We expect institutional actors to be central in these mechanisms but also activists and civic leaders, who may become important elements in enhancing democratic qualities locally.

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