

# **Context versus structure: How local political elites respond to co-governance initiatives in different national settings**

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## **Abstract**

The focus of this paper is the pivotal role that local politicians play in co-governance initiatives such as participatory budgeting, area committees and area forums. Several studies have indicated that local political elites, operating within local representative democracies, embrace such participatory initiatives in principle while ensuring that outcomes from these initiatives have little impact upon policy and decision making in practice. Although these attitudes and behaviours have been widely observed it is far from clear what gives rise to them. At the same time, those few studies that have examined the relationship between participatory initiatives and local democracy in a cross contextual perspective have not successfully identified causes.

This paper will seek to discover how important and determinant is the role played by contextual variations by reviewing the evidence of four case studies; one from Spain, one from Brazil and two from the UK. Comparative insights will be generated by using a common frame of analysis drawn from institutional theory, specifically the Grammar of Institutions developed by Crawford and Ostrom (1995). The structural connection of these rules and its consequences to participation will also be examined from the perspective of Governmentality (Foucault, 1991), which allow us to trace the political rationalities underpinning governance. Finally, the findings from the different national settings are brought together and discussed. Implications for policy and research are then highlighted.

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## **Introduction**

In recent decades several measures have been taken by national and local governments to revitalize local representative democracy through reform attempts aimed at stimulating increased citizen participation and strengthening dialogue between citizens and local political elites. The background for these reform attempts is a growing concern regarding the legitimacy of local democracy, and especially the ability of local democratic institutions to foster a responsive relationship between citizens and political elites. One common feature of these reforms is the introduction of co-governance initiatives such as participatory budgeting, area committees and area forums; semi institutional democratic innovations initiated in order to create new arenas for citizen participation and communication between citizens and representatives. Although such initiatives often aim to enhance and support existing political institutions rather than replacing representative democracy with participatory institutions, the introduction of participatory initiatives has proven to place new demands on the central actors in local democracy.

The roles of citizens, policy makers and governmental officers in these initiatives often clash with their more traditional roles within representative systems of democratic governance. This conflict might arguably be greatest for local political elites, who are expected to be open for input from advocates of competing ideological perspectives and willing to change their policies in accordance to new perspectives and knowledge. The implementation of participatory co-governance initiatives also implies that political elites are held accountable for their political actions between elections; some projects also involve decision-making processes that bypass traditional representative institutions (Koopenjan 2004). This role poses a sharp contrast to established norms of representative democracy, where the elected representatives' actions are strongly determined by electoral promises and party programs; where loyalty and alignment to agreed policies is a widely accepted norm (Holmberg 1999).

Several studies have indicated that local political elites, operating within local representative democracies, embrace participatory initiatives in principle while ensuring that outcomes from these initiatives have little impact upon policy and decision making in practice (McKenna 2012). Participatory initiatives have often been found to be detached from the traditional party arena, as well as the established institutions of the representative democracy (Amnå 2006; Åström *et al.* 2010). Although these attitudes and behaviors have been widely observed it is far from clear what gives rise to them or how they vary between national contexts. It is highly uncertain to what extent the relationship between participatory initiatives and local representative democracy is stable and similar across contexts or varies in relation to factors such as institutional settings and political culture.

Two diverging perspectives on the problematic relationship between participatory initiatives and local representative democracy are apparent within the literature. According to one perspective participatory initiatives are fundamentally incompatible with institutions of representative democracy (McKenna 2011, pp. 8-10). The development of new arenas for political participation and co-operation or co-decision-making between citizens and political elites would require a transition or radicalization of representative democracy as a whole (Blaug 2002). The opposing perspective suggests that the relationship is dependent on the design of political institutions, norms and roles of political elites as well as the political culture. According to this perspective participatory initiatives must be made compatible with the core principles of representative democracy and existing democratic institutions (McLaverty 2002; Bayraktar 2006; Teorell 2006; Esaiasson 2010). However, making participatory initiatives compatible with existing institutions and actors is not a one way process but also dependent on the extent to which political institutions and actors are adapting to the logics of participatory politics (Karlsson 2012).

An understanding of these causes of attitudes and behaviors of political elites in relation to participatory initiatives in varying national context would allow judgments to be made about these two competing perspectives on the relationship between local

representative democracy and public participation. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to explore the relative influence of contextual factors and structural conditions in determining these behaviors in a comparative context, identifying their variations and common aspects. The paper undertakes this task in three stages. First a common framework of analysis, drawing in institutional theory, is established. Second, original empirical research from Brazil, Spain and the UK, is used to determine the formal and informal rules that operate for the local political elites in each setting and the relationship of these rules both with contextual factors and structural conditions. Finally, the findings from the different national settings are brought together and discussed. Implications for policy and research are then highlighted.

### **Analytical Framework**

The analytical framework used here to organise the evidence from the different case studies is built from the Grammar of Institutions syntax developed by Crawford and Ostrom (1995). Ensuring conceptual clarity is important as institutional theory is a field that has been beset by definitional disputes over the years (Hodgson 2006). The Grammar of Institutions is also a means of organising the diversity of institutional understandings into a single manageable framework. It breaks the concept of institutional rules down into clearly defined and connected components and helps 'strengthen our understanding of the link between institutions and theories of action' (Crawford and Ostrom 1995, p. 596). Before giving a description of the framework it is worth saying something about its role within this paper.

The framework fulfils two important functions. First, as the evidence presented in this paper has been gathered independently for different research projects, the framework provides a common conceptual language that makes comparison possible and offers the possibility of fresh insights by allowing familiar problems to be seen from new perspectives. However, much more can be gained from a comparative study. As Hopkin suggests; 'perhaps the principle function of comparison in political science is that of developing, testing and refining theory' (2002, p. 249). The ambition here,

therefore, is to use the framework to test the previously stated hypotheses about the relative importance of the context and structure in influencing the responses of local political elites to participatory initiatives.

The Grammar of Institutions uses institutional statements as its building blocks. Crawford and Ostrom use the term institutional statement as a generic concept that captures the wide range of institutional concepts such as rules, norms and strategies. Specifically an *institutional statement* is:

...a shared linguistic constraint or opportunity that prescribes, permits, or advises actions or outcomes for actors (both individual and corporate). Institutional statements are spoken, written, or tacitly understood in a form intelligible to actors in an empirical setting. In theoretical analyses, institutional statements will often be interpretations or abstractions of empirical constraints and opportunities. (Crawford and Ostrom 1995, p. 3)

The value of the Grammar of Institutions is that it not only provides a definitional framework for the different institutional statements but clearly describes their relationships:

Regardless of how institutional statements are expressed in natural language, they can be rewritten in the ADICO format, where:

**A** ATTRIBUTES is a holder for any value of a participant- level variable that distinguishes to whom the institutional statement applies (e.g., 18 years of age, female, college-educated, 1-year experience, or a specific position, such as employee or supervisor).

**D** DEONTIC is a holder for the three modal verbs using deontic logic: *may* (permitted), *must* (obliged), and *must not* (forbidden).

**I** AIM is a holder that describes particular actions or outcomes to which the deontic is assigned.

○ CONDITIONS is a holder for those variables which define when, where, how, and to what extent an AIM is permitted, obligatory, or forbidden.

○ OR ELSE is a holder for those variables which define the sanctions to be imposed for not following a rule.

All shared strategies can be written as [ATTRIBUTES] [AIM] [CONDITIONS] (AIC); all norms can be written as [ATTRIBUTES] [DEONTIC] [AIM] [CONDITIONS] (ADIC); and all rules can be written as: [ATTRIBUTES] [DEONTIC] [AIM] [CONDITIONS] [OR ELSE] (ADICO). The syntax is cumulative: norms contain all of the components of a shared strategy plus a DEONTIC; rules contain all the components of a norm plus an OR ELSE.

(Crawford and Ostrom 1995, p. 4)

Drawing on the Grammar of Institutions it should be possible to provide a tightly defined institutional account of how local political elites respond to participatory initiatives. These responses can be conceptualised as institutional rules. In other words, when faced with participatory initiatives, local political elites employ shared strategies that are informed by common norms that are given force by perceived sanctions ('or elses').

Previous research indicates the types of institutional statements that might be expected to be uncovered. Shared strategies, for example, may reflect processes of deflection, accommodation and incorporation by local political elites (Barnes *et al.* 2004). They may occur during the design (and re-design) of initiatives, at the agenda setting stage, during the operation of initiatives and when non-decision making is applied to the outcomes from initiatives. The types of common norms that might be expected include those relating to representative democracy or those referring to loyalty to political parties (Copus 2004). Expected sanctions are likely to include the loss of votes or reduced governing competence.

When analysing the different cases the Grammar of Institutions approach prompts the following questions are to be asked:

- What institutional rules (consisting of linked shared strategies, norms and sanctions) guide the responses of local political elites to participatory initiatives?
- Are these rules shaped by context specific factors or structural factors, in other words those associated with liberal representative politics?

By asking these questions in more than one national context it may then be possible to reach some tentative conclusions about the problem in hand, not least because of the wide differences between the settings. First, the similarities and differences between institutional statements in different national settings will be suggestive of the relative importance of context and structure. Second, in theoretical terms, international comparison will allow some testing of the two hypotheses as; 'if a hypothesised link between two or more variables is replicated across a wide variety of different settings, then there are stronger grounds for arguing that there is a causal link between the variables (Hopkin 2002, p. 255).

Finally, before embarking on the case studies it is important to reflect on the limitations of the approach. As already noted, the national cases were conducted as part of independent research projects and were not constructed as a part of a single research design. Case studies A and B are UK cases, drawn from ongoing PhD research, and are unnamed. Case studies C and D are drawn from a completed PhD thesis and are named. The different research origins are bound to undermine, to some extent, the comparability of the evidence being considered. Second, as with any such comparative approach the problem of extraneous variance needs to be recognised (Peters 1998). Third, the small number of cases also needs to be recognised as a limitation. Finally, as well as differences in the settings there will be differences in the types and characteristics of the different participatory initiatives and it is important to catalogue these differences and how they might be influential in triggering the responses of local political elites.

## Case Study A

The modernisation reforms around the Local Government Act 2000 encouraged local councils to enhance public engagement through the use of decentralised forms of decision making such as area forums and area committees (Sullivan 2003). While these arrangements were not compulsory, by 2004 around 22 per cent of local councils in England and Wales had some form of area committee and 54 per cent had some form of area forum (Local Government Association 2004). The subject of this case study was one such council; a Unitary Council with a population of around 210,000. Area Forums, in a number of different incarnations, operated in this Council until at least 2011. In 2008 they were rebranded and, for the three years following this, they received their highest level of political and financial support. However, in 2010 they were scaled back significantly as part of the Council's programme of budget savings.

The fieldwork for this case study took place between October 2009 and July 2010 and included nine semi structured interviews, a survey of all 60 councillors (response rate 47%), observation of a Forum meeting and analysis of relevant reports, minutes and other associated material. From the field work seven intuitional rules were identified. Following the Grammar of Institutions each rule was broken down into its component shared strategy, normative condition and institutional logic. Each of the shared strategies was evidenced through either oral or written institutional statements. The institutional logics were inferred rather than directly evidenced, however their credibility was explicitly checked with key actors.

In this case study, the cumulative effect of councillor attitudes and behaviours toward the Forums over their ten year history was to ensure that, politically speaking, they remained in the shadows; they remained outside of normal politics and had limited impact on the policy process; their impact on council decision making was certainly no greater than locally influential. These behaviours, which broadly correspond with the category of 'deflection' identified by Newman et al (2004), can be broken down into three distinct shared strategies.

The first shared strategy, which was reflected in the design of the operating rules for the Forums, was to ensure that the Forums did not have their responsibilities increased. This strategy of delimitation was clearly evident, for example, in debates over whether the Forums should be given greater formal powers. The second strategy was to ensure that no contentious issues were channelled through the Forums. This was reflected in agenda management, councillor behaviours during the meetings and in the way in which the reports were presented to Council where there was a clear unwillingness to utilise the reporting mechanism, established to report Forum outcomes to Council meetings, to address any significant policy issues. The third strategy was to encourage councillors to concentrate on championing local service issues in Forum meetings. When the Forums were reviewed in 2008, for example, the report argued that 'the new style area forums should seize the opportunities to champion local concerns' and that they should 'be able to directly influence the way in which local service provision (whether by the council or other local agencies) responds to local needs'.

From the fieldwork six normative conditions associated with the shared strategies were identified. The first of these, linked to the strategy of limiting the power of the Forums, was that the Forums should not threaten group unity by giving more power to back bench councillors. Similarly, the second normative condition reflected an anxiety in the group about councillors experiencing a 'crisis of representation', in other words being torn between the wishes of the group and the wishes of their local electorate. This was clearly linked to the shared strategy of ensuring that contentious issues were kept away from the Forums and was the attitude of the ruling group as a whole not just the leadership.

Perhaps the most powerful normative condition in this case study was that of democratic legitimacy, in other words where the Forums were attracting insufficient numbers of participants in the eyes of councillor, this disqualified them from being part of the local democratic process, particularly when compared to the democratic claim of elected local politicians. Specifically this norm was evident in debates about whether

the Forums should have been granted more powers. A fourth normative condition was that forums should not provide political opponents with opportunities. This norm, that the forums should be 'outside of normal politics,' was linked to both the shared strategy of ensuring that contentious topics were avoided and that of councillors focusing on championing local service issues through the meetings. There was consensus across political parties that adversarial politics should be kept away from these types of issues.

The fifth and sixth normative conditions were also linked to the shared strategy for ensuring that councillors focused on championing local service issues. Councillors were concerned that forums did not become seen as 'talking shops' and saw it as necessary to intervene when this was a possibility. Finally, there was a clearly expressed concern that the forums should not become dominated by paid officials at the expense of elected councillors.

Two institutional logics were inferred from the case study; both were of a structural rather than a contextual nature. The first logic concerned the threat to the elite's ability to govern competently. Both of the conditions relating to group unity were linked to anxieties about the exercise of power and specifically the ability of the local political elite's leadership to manage the party group as a coherent unit. Concerns about the democratic legitimacy of the forums reflected anxieties that the 'elected' legitimacy of councillors could subsequently be undermined and therefore their authority would also be challenged. Concerns about paid officials taking centre stage in the forums were also linked to the ability to govern effectively with councillors seeing one of their traditional avenues of 'getting things done' being undermined. The second institutional logic was concerned with the ability to win elections. Primary this was present in concerns that the Forums might provide political opportunities for opponents but was also behind anxieties that the Forums were being regarded by the public as talking shops. Bad public experiences of the Forums were, in the eyes of councillors, likely to come back on the elected representatives at election time.

These institutional logics must come with a health warning as they were hypothesised before the fieldwork was undertaken and therefore 'looked for'.

Furthermore, as such institutional logics are unobservable their existence must be inferred and this implies a significant degree of uncertainty. However, the institutional logics reported here are deemed to be credible as each was consistent with the empirical evidence gathered and considered reasonable in the eyes of interviewees with whom they were explicitly explained as theories.

This study certainly suggests that structural rather than contextual factors were at work. There was clear evidence that party differences were not a factor and therefore that ideology had a minimal effect on the institutional rules. There were, however, three possible contextual influences that suggested themselves as potentially significant. The first was the very close balance of power between the two largest parties with political control of the Council switching regularly. This may have contributed to the desire to keep the Forums outside of 'normal politics'. Second, there was a split across all party groups between councillors with a party orientation and those with a community orientation. The balance of this split may have an influence on group behaviour. Third, organised public involvement through residents associations clearly had an impact with those parts of the borough where these groups were active as a consequence had more active Forums, which continued even following the reductions in support.

### **Case Study B**

The fieldwork for the second UK case study, which concerned an urban unitary authority with a population of about 420,000 people, took place between October 2010 and November 2011 and included nine semi structured interviews, a survey of all 70 councillors (response rate 69%), observation of two partnership meetings and analysis of relevant reports, minutes and other associated material. As with the first case study, the shared strategies and normative conditions were evidenced, the institutional logics were inferred but subsequently checked with relevant actors.

As with the first case study, the Council had established Community Partnerships as a co-governance mechanism intended to engage the public in decision making. The Community Partnerships had their origins as area forums, introduced by a Labour

administration in 2008 and inspired by the Labour Government's local government modernisation agenda. However, unlike the Forums of the first case study, the Community Partnerships were developed into formal decision making bodies by a subsequent Liberal Democrat administration and, despite the public finance crisis; they actually saw a significant increase in financial and officer support in 2010. Whereas the original Community Partnerships had been introduced as a consistent structure of area forums across the city, incorporating the regeneration partnerships and community partnerships that already existed in some areas, and filling the gap where they did not, the upgrade placed 'neighbourhood committees', a formal decision making body for local councillors, in the centre of the Community Partnership structure. In addition local 'mini' area forums were added to provide a mechanism for gathering public views and officers were employed to support community development, community engagement and the structure itself.

Behind these structures was a fundamentally different power model for local politics than was present in the first case study. Whereas in the first case study, the party group maintained a central authority over the majority of decisions, in the second an 'autonomy model' operated whereby the political leadership was content to devolve responsibility over 'low political' matters to ward councillors. Rather than the process of 'deflection' associated with the first case study, in this case 'incorporation' (Barnes *et al.* 2004) is a more valid description. Overall, while the Community Partnerships have had little strategic impact on decision making they have had a high degree of influence on decision making at the local level. The devolution of responsibilities to councillors at ward level has been significant in this case although it is debatable whether the involvement of the public has been decisive as politicians retain the final say within the neighbourhood committees.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the different power model operating, the shared strategies deployed by councillors in this case study were different to those observed in case study A. The first of the five observed strategies was to ensure that the partnerships had a consistent role for local councillors. This was evident in the process

of organising the various regeneration and community led partnerships into one structure and at the same time providing this structure for areas without any form of partnership previously. In some areas, where active partnerships already existed, there was a trade off between increased influence and reduced community control in favour of local councillors although this was not something that all councillors felt comfortable with. The second strategy was to ensure that councillors held final responsibility for decisions through the neighbourhood committees; legal arrangements that operated within the Community Partnerships. While these committees were necessary in order for decisions to be devolved, in practice different partnerships could operate on a spectrum between councillors *making decisions with the public* at one end and councillors *making decisions in public* at the other.

A third strategy was to ensure that the partnerships did not consider contentious issues such as those that might have been dealt with by a planning committee for example. A fourth was to ensure that the partnerships focused on local issues only hence limiting the possibility of affecting strategic, council wide, decisions. There was a mechanism for 'influencing' council wide policies such as community safety, for example, but this related to the implementation of these policies in local areas rather than to influencing strategic decision making. The final shared strategy was to side with the public in challenging the perceived central bureaucracy of the council. This was reflected both in a determination to reduce red tape and paperwork but also in a 'witness' examination of officials in meetings. This had the effect of focusing the partnerships on the scrutiny of service delivery and on the work of officers rather than on more proactive policy and decision making.

From the fieldwork four normative conditions associated with the shared strategies were identified. The first of these, linked to the strategy of ensuring that the partnerships had a central decision making role for councillors, was that co-governance structures should not be operating outside of the council's formal structures. Particularly when this meant that there were inconsistencies between what different councillors were able to achieve in different areas. One councillor used the word

'structuralise' to describe the process of bringing the pre-existing partnerships into a single set of council wide arrangements. The second condition, very similar to one found in Case Study A, and linked to the strategy of councillors taking the greater responsibility for decision making, was that this should certainly happen where the public attending meetings lacked democratic legitimacy in that they were 'unrepresentative' or lacking in numbers. The third condition, also similar to one found in Case Study A, was that the perceived possibility of a 'crisis of representation', in other words councillors being put in a public position of opposition to the community, meant that contentious topics, such as those associated with planning decisions should be avoided at partnership meetings.

The fourth normative condition reflected the 'power model' being employed and the significant devolution agenda in play. Specifically councillors regarded their devolved powers as part of a broader 'independence agenda' whereby they were able to exercise greater control over affairs in their areas. For many the reduced role of the back bench councillor had been an issue of concern since the introduction of cabinet style government 10 years previously. Devolved decision making tapped into these norms and led to two particular sets of behaviours that had the effect of limiting the potential policy outcomes from the partnerships, if not locally then certainly strategically. First it led to the emphasis on local rather than city wide issues and second, councillors saw their role as providing a challenge to what was perceived as the 'central bureaucracy' and this in turn had the effect of giving the partnerships a different focus; one closer to that of scrutiny of officials, albeit alongside the public, rather than a focus on decision and policy making.

As with Case Study A, two institutional logics concerned with governing competence and winning elections were inferred and both were of a structural rather than a contextual nature. The difference, however, was that these logics derived from a different power model, one which provided for the relative autonomy of back bench councillors over issues regarded as low politics. Hence anxieties about the consistency of the back bench councillor role, challenges to the democratic legitimacy of the local

councillor, uncomfortable 'crises of representation' and central challenges to back bench independence can all be linked back to the need to maintain authority. Similarly working with the public in partnership meetings implies an electoral benefit albeit at the local rather than city wide level. This is in contrast with Case Study A where a 'central authority' power model generated institutional rules associated with group loyalty and the conduct of council wide party politics.

While the institutional rules observed in this case study were associated with the wider structure of local politics, they were borne out of a particular power model which, it could be argued, was itself a consequence of particular local conditions. A strong community and voluntary sector along with some highly active regeneration partnerships created a governance environment at the local level that local politicians were keen to engage with. As with Case Study A, a very close electoral balance between the main parties created an environment where it was unreasonable to expect that political control of the council could be maintained for any period of time. It seems likely, therefore, that this made a strategy based on holding power at the community level more attractive. A preference for community politics also marked a difference between the political parties and, although there was ultimately consensus about the way in which the partnerships operated, this was born out of compromise with the Liberal Democrats being much clearer about the devolution agenda.

In summary, the Community Partnerships described in this case study represented a genuine mechanism for devolution of some decisions down to the community level. However, as the central premise was to enhance the role of local councillors the partnerships only resulted in some limited influence of the public over decisions at the local level.

### **Case Study C**

The Participatory Budget of São Paulo, carried out by the municipal administration between 2001 - 2004 and led by the PT (Workers Party) leaders, was considerably successful in some aspects: the number of people mobilized (around 80

thousand), the incentives to foster participation of marginalized groups and the formation/ qualification of participant delegates and councillors, elected to negotiate with the government (Sánchez 2004). This case was studied through 15 in depth interviews with different actors involved in the process: political leaders of the opposition and the administration, frequent participants and technical employees. All of them were asked to identify the main problems of the experience and what may have caused them. Their perceptions were then contrasted with the information collected from primary and secondary sources. Part of the research was carried out as direct participant, involved in the process as City Council's employee.

Although the high-level goals and potentials of the Participatory Budget according to its empowered institutional design, the program had serious constraints in the execution of the proposals and in the territorial performance. All limitations of the program seem not to be produced by methodological imperfections or design limitations, but rather by traditional practices of representation. Such as private favouritism, named clientelism; coalition formation, necessary for governability in a multi party context; and electoral strategies focused in centralizing power in the political party and its few leaders. All this set of norms, rules and strategies were in direct conflict with a robust participatory process, restraining its potentials (Resende 2009).

The clientelism worked as a norm and shared strategy. As a possible and common strategy for local representatives to obtain electoral support from specific communities offering them jobs or benefits; and, as channels for citizens and civic elites to express their demands to particular representatives. It is a norm, as is not a mandatory practice in political institutions, neither is it a punishable behaviour, rather it is so common that people in government and in the society see it as the standard and easiest relationship between communities and the local representatives. But, it does not suit the contact people-politicians require in an empowered participatory program. Political leaders who are usually involved in clientelism tend to boycott other efforts of citizen engagement (see Abers 1998). In São Paulo, these practices discouraged neighbors from participating in assemblies and generated two opposed types of citizen

demands to be responded by sub-local administrations: one officially channeled by forums of Participatory Budgeting and the other unofficially channeled by personal and privileged relationships of favoritism, between community and political leaders. The first is an emblematic example of a decision-making routine that seeks to meet public interests by strengthening cooperation, individual autonomy and self-government. The second is a great example of private interest being systematically held in public institutions, in a certain way that dampens collective action and makes people's emancipation dependent on personal connection to a political leader (see Putnam 1993).

We can understand strategies for strengthening visibility and political power of the party and its top leaders as the political system rules. Less avoidable, it is obvious that for a party and political leaders to survive in a democratic representative context, it depends to large extent on them being remembered and recognized by the people. This relies in turn on their capacity to show what they do and how important that is for society. Empowered participatory processes in which the people are the ones who take decisions for public investments are in visible tension with political leaders' interests to make visible constructions in central areas or to be considered responsible for an urgent social service provided to the most impoverished.

The Participatory Budget was coordinated by one of the far left internal PT groups, the *Democracia Socialista*. The limited institutional status of the program inside the City Council structure generated important difficulties in its performance, although it was slightly improved over the years. Such limits in the basic organizational capacities of the program were given by the dominant power in an attempt to hold the experience outside the City Council central planning. As a direct consequence of the participation, we can highlight: the deficient capacity to call people to participate; the scarce publicity of results; the few areas of investments affected; the short impact of the program in the annual municipal planning and the low level of accomplished proposals.

Another important rule inevitable in multiparty systems is the need for alliances and coalitions for governability. The heterogeneity of leaders holding the highest

municipal responsibilities affected the way participatory proposals were accomplished. Some departments, such as Education, tried to accomplish almost all the proposals. Others, such as the Health Department occasionally selected popular proposals that had already been defined as a priority by technicians. The Household Department used to give more attention to the parallel participatory channels, like the Municipal Household Council, in which there was high presence of associations with close connections to the head of the department. His department and many others, such as Environmental, Transportation and Security, to mention some with the highest budgets, have hardly executed any of the approved proposals emitted by citizens on the Participatory Budget.

In addition to the lack of consensus involving PT leaders in main local executive offices, the administration strategy to assure solid governability in the City Council was expressed by setting agreements with almost every party with representation in the Municipal Chamber. The coalition allowed local representatives to name the head of several political offices in the sub-local executive board. The strategy was efficient to assure approval of practically any proposal issued by the executive, but generated serious problems in decentralized aspects of the participatory program. Most notorious effects were felt in the call of participants, the organization of assemblies and the accomplishment of proposals to be executed at the district level.

### **Case Study D**

The Council of Social Welfare in Barcelona (CMBS) started back in 1986 with the first regulation for citizen participation in the municipality. The Council was pioneered after democratic transition and is still a highly regarded council among 22 other local councils currently being run by the city administration. What makes it a renowned board, besides its long existence, is mostly the consistent frequency of meetings and the commitment to its development from political leaders in the corresponding area. The research in Barcelona was based in interviews with political leaders, opposition and administration, frequent participants, experts, volunteers and technical employees. The

focus of the data collection was in the identification of council problems and their possible causes.

The most important limitation of the CMBS is found in its institutional design not in the way it has been performing over the years. Created by the City Council of Barcelona, its main objective was not to allow citizens to make or affect political decisions directly but rather to create spaces for information, reflection and debate among the administration and main local organizations (see Subirats 2005). According to its formal rules, the Social Welfare Council was mainly designed to improve the coordination of social policies provided by administrations of different levels and NGOs, and to study and issue reports on the local situation of social welfare, discussing and promoting responses to these situations. Although not a formal objective stated in the council's statute, many that we have interviewed also mentioned that its intention is also to encourage a culture of social welfare, which could be achieved through one of its main goals: raising awareness about city's social conditions.

Setting social investments as a priority is a really difficult challenge for the City Council, which could be understood by the administration's commitment with real estate agencies and transnational enterprises to modernize the city (Delgado 2007). Thus, a Social Welfare Council could be important to strengthen the option for public investments in the social field, among the media and the most reluctant part of the social and political elite. In fact, the council has an important program of awarding media coverage on social welfare topics in Barcelona. It undoubtedly helps to provoke journalistic interest in the social field, but the mass media is still far more interested in showing social problems as security problems than in showing the necessity for public investments in social services.

What helps the success of the CMBS to attend its functions is the fact its proposals are mostly directed to only one field of the city council: the social area. Therefore the diagnoses and most of the recommendations issued by the participants only have to be taken into account by a single political leader. This highly increases commitment with the board and strengthens the political decisions made in this division

of the local executive. All other proposals emitted by the CMBS, applicable to other administrative fields, demand an intense process of negotiation, showing that not every leader easily accepts popular proposals emitted by councils of different areas. This is a typical conflict of power, that does not provoke severe consequences to the governability or the credibility of the council simply because the council does not make binding decisions.

It is important to observe that most of the proposals issued by the council participants are frequently accepted by the political leader in charge of the area, due to a high convergence between these proposals and the political project previously assumed. This can be explained by the rules of the deliberative process: all participants allowed to vote in the final sessions are representing the city's most recognized social organizations. The membership to the council plenary is formally given by the mayor or other political leader named by the mayor, usually the head of the Social Welfare area.

The consequence is that, on most topics, the participants have very similar approaches to those assumed by the city council, even though they often present their own position rather than the one of the organization they are representing. As none of the radical or alternative social organizations are represented in the council working groups or plenary, no proposal would really cause problems to the head of the Social Welfare area to carry it out. In case that a certain proposal does not fit the current political project of the administration it will have minimum chances of been carried out. It is surely contributing with the local administration capacity to respond to participants' proposals the fact they may not have an adequate format to be translated into public policies. Proposals can be approved by the Council of Social Welfare even when they are too broad and unspecific on how government responses to a social problem should be.

The lack of social diversity and conflicts, as only the civic elite are allowed to participate, attends the fact proposals don't have binding effects on decision making. Current participants could hardly be acknowledged as valid representatives of local people and not even representatives of the network of social organizations. Without a

consensual acknowledgement of the council representativeness based on an open opportunity of all citizens to engage in its meetings, it could never have binding decisions. The legitimacy to take political decisions still rests exclusively on traditional representative boards. The major role of the council is to support, legitimate and improve the quality of these decisions.

## Observed Institutional Rules

The purpose of this paper has been to explore the relative influence of contextual factors and structural conditions in determining the behaviors of elected representatives toward co-governance initiatives in comparative context. From the four case studies a series of 12 institutional rules have been observed. These rules, which have been framed according to the Grammar of Institutions syntax developed by Crawford and Ostrom (1995) are summarised in table 1.

*Table 1: Institutional rules observed from the case studies*

<b>RULE</b>	<b>Shared Strategies</b>	<b>Normative Condition</b>	<b>Institutional Logic</b>
<b>Group Loyalty 1 (A)</b>	The ruling group should limit the powers of Area Forums / prevent them from making contentious recommendations	When Forums have the potential to threaten group unity by giving more power to backbench councillors	Or else the ability to govern competently will be undermined
<b>Group Loyalty 2 (B)</b>	The ruling group should prevent the Community Partnerships from considering contentious issues	When Partnerships have the potential to threaten group unity by provoking a 'crisis of representation'	Or else the ability to govern competently will be undermined
<b>Group Loyalty 3 (D)</b>	The ruling group should limit the power and membership of Council to prevent it from making contentious recommendations	When Council have the potential to threaten important stakeholders capacity of influence in the administration	Or else the ability to govern competently will be undermined
<b>Representative 1 (A)</b>	Party groups should limit the powers of Area Forums	When the Forums do not have sufficient democratic legitimacy	Or else the ability to govern competently will be undermined

<b>Representative 2 (B)</b>	The ruling group should ensure that Community Partnerships have a central decision making role for councillors	When Partnerships are operating outside of representative structures / the public attending Partnership meetings do not have sufficient democratic legitimacy	Or else the ability to govern competently will be undermined
<b>Party Politics (A)</b>	Party groups should prevent the Area Forums from making contentious recommendations / ensure that Councillors focus on championing local service issues in meetings	When the Forums have the potential to provide opponents with political opportunities	Or else the ability to win elections will be undermined
<b>Public Utility (A)</b>	Party groups should ensure that Councillors focus on championing local service issues in Forum meetings	When the Forums are seen as 'talking shops'	Or else the ability to win elections will be undermined
<b>Professional's Accountability (A)</b>	Party groups should ensure that Councillors focus on championing local service issues in Forum meetings	When the Forums are dominated by professionals at the expense of elected local councillors	Or else the ability to govern competently will be undermined
<b>Community Politics (B)</b>	Councillors should focus only on locally devolved issues in Community Partnerships / side with the public to challenge 'central bureaucracy' in the Community Partnerships	When the independence of local councillors is challenged	Or else the ability to govern competently will be undermined
<b>Clientelism (C)</b>	Representatives should conduct political business away from assemblies	When political support can be obtained through favoured personal relationships with community members	Or else the ability to win elections will be undermined
<b>Party Control (C)</b>	Representatives should disregard the outcomes from assemblies	When participants decisions threatens party alliances and electoral strategies	Or else the ability to govern competently will be undermined

The diversity of the different rules is notable and perhaps reflects the differences in political culture, political systems and the political environment in which those systems operate. However, there are also interesting similarities. So, for example, the bypassing of the Forums in case study A may be considered alongside the clientelism of case study C. In both cases the co-governance mechanisms are considered to be

outside of 'normal politics' by the respective representatives who offer strategies of deflection. In another example case studies B and D show strong similarities in the way in which the respective initiatives are incorporated into the pre existing political structures and while this has meant greater support from government structures it has also resulted in a greater degree of control by political actors.

In the case studies we can therefore observe the interplay of both context and structure but, while context may determine locally specific behaviours these appear to be anchored in familiar and common representative structures.

## **Conclusion**

The political strategies taken in representative institutions move away from established formal rules and are shaped according to the balance of power, policy networks and interests of the most influential actors. The promotion and effort of political actors to launch and strengthen participatory programs are varied by the historical, institutional, political, social and cultural contexts. Their strategies to gain power are evidently important, but their ideological profile and the terrain where they are acting must also be taken into account, as it will provoke variations in their strategies. The problem is that a political program, like the participatory ones, that changes the exercise of power, needs political and social consensus. In the absence of consensus, only few leaders at the top of the hierarchy will choose the strategies and follow the norms more convenient for their maintenance in the institutional power. The rules and norms of the representative democratic system are basically the same, independently of the context. But how they are followed or not by the main political actor in local political institutions, the four cases studied in this research shows that there are important variations.

From a perspective further away from contextual variations, the comparative research enables us to observe that every participatory experience controlled by state institutions is somehow limited. There are some common elements of the liberal democratic structure that are surely behind all variables: the hierarchy of the decision-

making process, the difference of power among political, social and economical actors, and the electoral and governability interests.

Although there are always political actors who wish to create space for citizen participation on policy-making, the party's leadership, which supports these actors, constantly deploys clashing strategies to ensure a supposed need to concentrate power in few leaders. These strategies to strengthen political positions or visibility are variable according to the social and political networks which governmental and parliamentary leaders need to consolidate their power. Political leaders will constrain developments of citizen participation whenever it may increase the level of uncertainty in their political power. But, as the logic of human decisions is not static, the varied characteristics that differentiate actors allow possibilities for some social creativity and participation. The complex articulation among institutions, rules, interests, social demands, networks and identity profiles provoke permanent challenges to the liberal and representative structure of power. Therefore, many public administrations are increasingly combining public services and closer contacts with citizens, through different kinds of participatory instruments carried out with more or less capacity to empower people. It is highly arguable, however, how much power can the people get from political institutions to change these same institutions and provide ourselves an improved self-government.

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