



## Donostia–San Sebastián: governance structures and collective action in the context of the crisis

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Cover photo by Imanol Telleria. *Participatory process: Our neighbourhoods and towns make Donostia stronger.*

## **TRANSGOB: Transformations of urban governance in the context of the crisis. Evolution and prospects for participative governance in Spain and the UK**

The TRANSGOB project addresses the impact of the economic crisis on forms of urban governance in Spain, contrasting the Spanish experience with that of the United Kingdom. It aims to analyse how practices of participative governance are evolving and their future prospects in a context marked by budget austerity, social conflict and political crisis. In more general terms, we want to explore the implications of such dynamics of change for the relations between state and non-state actors at the local level.

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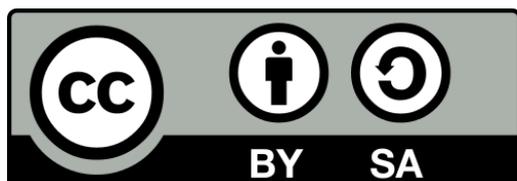
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## Introduction

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In this report we analyse governance mechanisms in the city of Donostia–San Sebastián in order to better understand the responses that have emerged to the current crisis and the relationships that have been established between the local administration and the social fabric.

The first part looks at how Donostia differs from the rest of Spain due to its location in a relatively better socio-economic environment and one with less inequality. Basque cities have better and more autonomous financing; social rights are more extensive and enjoy greater protection in the Basque political subsystem; and, lastly, we must also add another distinctive situational feature, which is the presence of a local government aligned with an ideology that lies to the left of contemporary social democracy. However, this more desirable scenario does not mean that the effects of the crisis are not felt.

Moreover, we also find a distinctive social context that influences the social response to the crisis. Specifically, we will explain the minor impact of the cycle of protests initiated by the 15M movement in the spring of 2011 on the Basque Country and on Donostia.

Based on this set of peculiarities, we tackle the main theoretical discussion of this report, which turns us to the concept of variegated neoliberalisation (Brenner et al., 2010) in the context of austerity urbanism (Peck, 2012). According to this perspective, in order to understand actual neoliberalism, we need to study the variety of forms and paths to the restructuring of regulations directed by the market through places, territories, and scales; that is, neoliberalisation is understood as a ‘variegated, geographically uneven and path dependent process’ (Brenner et al., 2010b: 330). We will show how the city of Donostia presents a series of variegated spatio-temporal elements that are relevant for the study of the transformations of governance in times of crisis.

For this purpose, in the fifth section we analyse the development of participatory politics in the city. We focus on current reactions, trying to identify concrete examples to help us characterise the political orientation of the institutional responses to the crisis. These responses, together with the evolution of citizen and social action movements (both classic and new movements emerging from the crisis), generate a collaborative type of relationship between the local administration and the social fabric that reinforces the dynamics of participatory governance in the city. All of this is favoured by a society in which the political parties have considerable influence and enjoy significant links with civil society associations.

The field work was based on in-depth interviews carried out in three different phases between 2013 and 2015: a first exploratory phase examining the reality of the case study with strategic informants from the social fabric (people from community groups, feminists, urban activists, and local public administrators); a second phase looking more in detail at the most important issues with agents from collectives with a significant role in the city (five interviewees), as well as other municipal officials from more specific areas (four interviewees); and a third phase whose objective was to follow-up on the processes and mechanisms studied and where the people from the previous phases were interviewed

once again. We have codified the interviews to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees and also to identify their origin: social agent (SA), specialist staff (SS), or policymaker (PM).

This report concludes with a final assessment of the state of participatory governance in the city, indicating the key factors that support it and highlighting once again the distinctive structural and cultural features that coincide in the case of Donostia.

## A unique context vis-à-vis the rest of Spain

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Donostia–San Sebastián has 186,126 inhabitants and the metropolitan area has 436,000. The city's main activities are trade and tourism. Moreover, the city is encircled by an industrial belt where the secondary sector continues to be important.

Apart from this, Donostia is a city that, due to its location in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (CAPV in its Spanish acronym) and the province of Gipuzkoa, presents some characteristics that differentiate it from other cities in the Spanish and Basque contexts that we need to take into account for our study. We would like to highlight **four important elements**: a) the more limited effects of the crisis in light of the main economic indicators; b) the city's greater financial autonomy; c) the strength of the social policies of the Basque Government and of the Gipuzkoan Provincial Council; and d) the effects of the end of ETA's armed conflict and the election of a government that lies to the left of contemporary social democracy.

With regard to the first element, what stands out is the delay of the arrival of the economic crisis of 2008 and the different impact it has had on the Basque Country and especially on Gipuzkoa and its capital, Donostia. The average household income is higher and the rate of unemployment is lower in comparison to the averages of both Spain and the Basque Country.

The second key element refers to the special status enjoyed by Basque–Navarrese territories with regard to their financing, which grants greater financial autonomy to the Basque municipalities in comparison to the rest of Spain. The Basque–Navarrese provinces have their own economic agreement that affords them a high degree of autonomy, to the extent that it practically allows them design their own tax system, 'which, for practical purposes, grants them greater financial capacity (between 50% and 60%, approximately) than the communities of the standard system, facilitating the design of a genuine system of participation in the management of the agreed revenues' (Cordero and Murillo, 2008: 41).

The third element for understanding the specific features of Donostia is the social policies, among which we can highlight the development of the Income Security Fund and, to a lesser extent, the Social Emergency Aid scheme. Both instruments have shown themselves to be effective in the goal of maintaining a high degree of social cohesion (Moreno, 2010: 475). In fact, the Basque Country was the first autonomous community in Spain to establish a public income security system in 1989 and it is the only autonomous community that can equate its mechanism with the majority of the countries in Western Europe (Lavia et al., 2014: 637). After 2008, with the growth in demand, the main Basque cities could not cover all of this aid

with the Basque Government budget and cities like Donostia have covered it with the municipal budget.

Lastly, the fourth differentiating element in Donostia is of a political nature: the definitive end of ETA's activity announced on 20 October 2011. This has facilitated the gradual return of Ezker Abertzale (Basque nationalist left) to the electoral race and its access to the mayor's office in Donostia with a programme that lies to the left of contemporary social democracy. This is a vital element when it comes to understanding the policies that the government team has prioritised, and as one policymaker put it:

'In a different political context (without austerity), we would have done more things and with greater ease (...) we have had to make cutbacks in gardening, maintenance, advertising... (...) to be able to maintain spending on social welfare (...) What has been reduced? In terms of staff, the salaries have been frozen and have decreased, replacements are not covered, there is no money for investments...'

## Responses to the crisis

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One thing that strikes us about the case of Donostia is the limited influence of the cycle of protests initiated by the 15M movement. The explanation can be organised into two dimensions, a structural dimension and a cyclical-situational dimension.

In terms of the structural dimension we can identify three factors:

- a) Protests such as the 15M that are associated with new urban social movements have a significant presence and impact in large cities (Fernández et al., 2012). However, Donostia is a small city with a markedly aged population. The combination of the small size and the age of its inhabitants generates a situation in which the population of between 15 and 35 years has a limited relative and quantitative weight (20.3% of the population; that is, 37,832 people according to the municipal census of 2014).
- b) In the CAPV, the socio-economic crisis has been tempered when compared to the rest of Spain due to a more solid and developed social protection system that buffers the consequences more effectively, which in turn constitutes a partial disincentive for social protest. Moreover, in the period of study the municipal government was in the hands of the most left-wing party in the Basque party system, which also acted as a demobilising factor and one that strengthened the social protection system. As a member of the government team asserted: "in a difficult economic situation, (social) services have been maintained and others have been improved" (PM. 1). However, we should not dismiss the general presence in Spanish politics of the crisis and austerity discourse. This discourse helps the local government maintain low expectations. One municipal specialist speaking about what she had observed in the social fabric expressed it as follows: "What I do see is a social fabric that, in its relationship with the administration, is aware of the limitations of the institutions and has a more responsible attitude (...) a very common sense attitude, understanding that the crisis also conditions the solutions that can be provided" (SS. 1).

- c) Basque nationalism is a key agent in socio-economic struggles in the CAPV. For example, the trade union majority in the CAPV is in the hands of Basque nationalist trade unions and in their social struggles they try to differentiate themselves from campaigns promoted at the state level (Elorrieta, 2012). Moreover, this dynamic is more accentuated in Donostia, the most Basque-speaking and nationalist capital in the Basque Country, which without doubt impedes the possible success of any protest dynamic that emerges at the state level and that reaches the city through an imitation effect. Lastly, it is worth pointing out that the main parties in the Basque Country are very well-established in the society and have a significant impact on other sectors. This influences the segmentation of different areas such as the media, trade unions, and associations, which means that the relationships between the different agents are not very autonomous.

Beyond the structural dimension, the cyclical-situational dimension linked to the end of ETA's armed activity also partially explains the limited echo of the *indignados* movement in the CAPV. We have to take into account the high degree of social tension and exhaustion experienced in Basque society, especially since social protests against ETA's violence gained prominence at the end of the 1990s, resulting in a dynamic of citizen confrontation in a period peppered with street violence, attacks by ETA, and more and more wide-spread repression of different sectors of Ezker Abertzale. The consequence was the beginning of the decline of the social movements at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Later, as a way to boost a process of détente, Ezker Abertzale facilitated a gradual reduction of social conflict to favour its strategy of political normalisation.

All of these elements explain why the mobilisation and echoes of protest of the *indignados* movement in Madrid and other parts of the world did not find a place in the existing networks nor among the non-organised population in the CAPV, and although some groups emerged under the umbrella of state-level initiatives, they were much weaker than those that developed in other areas (Perugarria and Tejerina, 2014).

## I. Variegated neoliberalisation and its influence on governance

As we said in the introduction, Donostia is a good example for highlighting the spatio-temporal variegation of neoliberalisation. This variegation serves us to explain the way in which 'local transformations relate to broader trends' (Harvey, 2005: 87), while remaining sufficiently sensitive to the importance of context.

Following the methodological proposal of Brenner, Peck, and Theodore, we focus especially on the 'systems of inter-jurisdictional policy transfer' (Brenner et al., 2010b) and their influence on urban governance. The transformation of government into governance in the local arena (Blanco et al., 2011) has meant a series of adaptations of institutional mechanisms with prototypical regulatory strategies for urban governance. These new institutional mechanisms are related to the second generation of studies on governance networks (Sorensen and Torfing, 2009), which focus interest on the impact of these networks bearing in mind their effectiveness and democratic quality. There are many

studies that, although with some differences (Subirats et al., 2008; Papadopoulos and Warin, 2007), place the emphasis on these two issues. Sorensen and Torfing (2009) identify six criteria for effectiveness and four for democratic quality. The effectiveness criteria have to do with the quality of the information in the process, the innovativeness of the mechanisms, the scope of the policies, the coordination and flexibility of the administration itself, and, lastly, the trust between actors in terms of the future. The democratic quality criteria, for their part, include the monitoring of the elected politicians, the diversity of actors, their responsibility towards the citizens, and the management of the network itself with rules and regulations of a democratic nature (including procedural fairness and agonistic pluralism). These criteria can be applied in a critical reading of participatory policies promoted by local government.

Moreover, returning to urban governance as inter-jurisdictional policy transfer, we observe the importance of the local historical trajectory and the institutional landscape in uneven regulatory development. That is, under the same concept of governance different ways of integrating participation and managing public policies develop. There is no doubt as to the importance of the role that governance has played in the process of neoliberalisation of cities (Swyngedouw, 2005), but as we have been arguing, the concrete mode in which it develops marks significant differences.

Thus, this uneven development could lead us to ‘scenarios of counter-neoliberalization’ (Brenner et al., 2010b) and what the authors characterise as ‘disarticulated counter-neoliberalization’. This scenario, which is coherent with the ideological leanings of the local government in Donostia, presents certain market-restraining regulatory experiments (fragmented and uncoordinated), although the general regulatory regime continues to be dominated by market logics. We find a parallel with the adaptive neocommunitarian strategy in the shift from the Keynesian Welfare National State (KWNS) to the Schumpeterian Workfare Postnational Regime (SWPR) characterised by Jessop (2003) that is made manifest in the governance of social policies. Assuming the limitations of local politics, this strategy implements actions for expanding the social economy, strengthening a third sector financed by the public authorities, and redirecting taxes in search of greater social cohesion through, for example, the creation of a citizens’ wage or a carers’ allowance.

Therefore, in the study of socio-spatial relations (Jessop et al., 2008) we need a more comprehensive perspective, which as well as the networks would also include territory, place, and scale. The combination of these dimensions applied to public policy allows us a more in-depth analysis of the transformations of urban governance and, as we will explain next, reveals a peculiar case of austerity urbanism. We also point to some social policy issues linked to the relationship between the local administration and third sector agents because the management of these policies ties in with one of the strategies of austerity urbanism (Peck, 2012): ‘scalar dumping’; i.e. the tendency towards the downward projection (in our case towards the local government) of the management of social conflicts.

## II. Participatory governance: changes in the government and the consolidation of the model

In 1991, with the arrival in power of a mayor from the Basque Socialist Party (PSE-PSOE, centre-left Spanish nationalist), a model of participatory governance for the city began to be conceptualised and developed. For the new mayor of Donostia, Odón Elorza, the socialist mayor of Barcelona was a role model. More ambitious policies for citizen participation were being implemented in Barcelona than in the Gipuzkoan capital. Soon relations between the two cities and their respective mayors became stronger; probably contributing to Donostia including the issue of citizen participation and its modernisation and improvement in its agenda. One example of this is the adoption of the regulation on citizen participation in Donostia in 1997, the first in the CAPV (Ajangiz and Blas, 2008: 38) and the bases on which different participation and governance instruments were created.

From 2002 onwards, the socialists no longer governed in coalition with centre-right parties and began to govern first alone as a minority and later in coalition with other left-wing parties. This once again boosted citizen participation policy. Thus, after the elections of 2003, the new government team, also as a minority and formed by the socialists in coalition with Ezker Batua-Berdeak (United Left-Greens), opted to implement limited and controlled participatory budgets.

Since 2001, we can identify three phases related to citizen participation policy in Donostia. The first was the promotion of participation (2001–2007) and the municipal government turned this into one of its main flagships (both at the city level and in terms of its external projection via international networks involved in the issue). In 2002, the Citizen Participation Office was created and between 2001 and 2005 the mayor got very actively involved and even led, personally or through his specialist team, the promotion of this policy in different municipal networks: the *Kaleidos* network for community-based policies, the *Association of Basque Municipalities*, the *International Observatory on Participatory Democracy*, and the *Federation of Spanish Municipalities and Provinces*. During these first years a variety of participatory mechanisms were backed to demonstrate the value of the commitment made: a nucleus of participatory intervention in the old town; a community development plan in a complex peripheral neighbourhood; a community development project in another peripheral neighbourhood that was combined with an investment project to rehabilitate the neighbourhood and link it with the city; the above-mentioned limited participatory budgets; public hearings with young people, the programme ‘the city and its children’; a citizen consultation on the design of an important square, debates with groups and associations on the development of different sectoral and cross-sectoral plans...; that is, the goal was ‘to develop participation through concrete projects’.<sup>1</sup> During this period, Donostia was one of the cities in the state with the greatest level of innovation in participatory processes (Navarro, Cuesta, and Font, 2009), boosting public deliberation and democratic engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Neighbourhoods and Citizen Participation: The Right to Participation and its Promotion in the City Council of Donostia, Assessment of participation, March 2006.

The Citizen Participation Office's current assessment of this period lists some problems with the design such as the disconnect between experiences, the lack of synergy in the municipal organisation, or the underuse of the territorial structure of local community facilities.<sup>2</sup> Despite everything, this promotion of participation, although disorganised and accused of a top-down perspective, left a mark on the models for managing public affairs that emphasised the importance of citizen participation and the concrete mechanisms associated with it. This period ended symbolically with the approval of the Master Plan for Citizen Participation (December 2006) and with the Regulation on Citizen Participation developed partially in a participatory way (July 2007).

In the second period (2007–2011), the priority of the Citizen Participation Department, supported by a left coalition government with an absolute majority, focused on the campaign to become the European capital of culture for 2016. The loss of prominence of participation, coinciding with the beginning of the crisis, would not be reversed until Bildu (a coalition of left-wing Basque sovereignists) entered the mayor's office in 2011:

'There's a willingness now to give stability and structure to the participation system, because until recently we had the feeling that we were doing one-off things that didn't consolidate into a stable system (...) Our main goal at this time is to generate political culture and from there focus action on participation; political participation, political culture as a necessary basis so this can truly move forward; taking steps to institutionalise it, trying to achieve guarantees, procedures, and resources that could give stability to this whole issue of participation'. [SS. 1]

This is the third period (2011–2015), with a Bildu minority government that made efforts to give a more prominent role to participatory policy by reflecting on the previous model and introducing new elements. This took place in a context where the effects of the crisis were beginning to be clearly felt. For example, the City Council experienced a reduction of approximately 25 per cent of the municipal budget in comparison to the previous legislative term. However, the budget for participation increased. In this sense, and as explained by a member of the government: "the significant changes in participatory policy haven't depended on the crisis, they depend on the politician and the policy they adopt. This government would not have been more participatory due to the economic crisis, they just coincided" (PM.2).

Among the flagship projects of Bildu's government team, we must mention the participatory process 'Our neighbourhoods and towns make Donostia stronger', initiated in 2012 and culminating with the participatory development of part of the municipal budget in 2015, that sought to involve the social fabric of the neighbourhoods in its management. The 2015 participatory budget gathered a total of 220 contributions in areas such as urbanism, economic development, or social welfare. After the initial meeting in eighteen

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with specialist staff from the City Council who valued the new experience of the last period (2011–2015) precisely for rectifying these problems: *'It also served to reveal the need to review ourselves within the City Council in terms of coordination and synergy between all the areas.'*

neighbourhoods with the presence of the mayor, the councillor for participation, and municipal specialists, the responsibility to lead the next neighbourhood meetings was placed on the neighbourhood associations with the help and presence of specialist staff from the City Council. The work of these neighbourhood meetings could last up to three months during which three proposals had to be developed for each of the five areas defined by the government team, generating a total of 15 proposals for each neighbourhood. Later, more than 100 people from the government team and specialist staff worked in a coordinated way to take the decision to exclude 48 proposals on the basis of technical and/or political criteria. The rest were included in the 2015 budgets bill, with 116 to be implemented during the budget year and 56 to begin in 2015 or 2016.

After taking the decision, the mayor and the staff of the government team returned to each of the neighbourhoods with the technical and political analysis of the 15 proposals previously prioritised, explaining their inclusion or not in the 2015 budget. The problem emerged when the budgets could not be approved in the municipal council meeting. The consequence was that the 2014 budgets were extended and the government team had to tackle the enormous task of trying to fit part of the proposals into the budget with the goal of minimising the frustration that could have emerged among those involved in the process.

Aware of the limitations of the previous experience, the Citizen Participation Department decided to begin a process of reflection in order to tackle the fit between participatory and representative logics in actual management. The result of the process of reflection differentiated between three different areas: the representatives, where the key in terms of participation is transparency and the ability to control the actions of the public officials (representative democracy); and the participatory processes, where the important thing is to generate creative processes that consolidate an active civil society (participatory democracy), expressed by the Citizen Participation Department as follows:

‘(...) it should serve to make the associations movement stronger, and one of our goals, for us (...) is to be aware of what our facilitating role should look like, and hopefully it will also serve us to structure systematised relationships that allow for a stable and enduring dynamic’ (SS. 2).

Lastly, the third area involves the decision-making capacity of the citizens through binding consultations on concrete issues that affect their neighbourhoods or the city (direct democracy). These three areas or fields related to participation have their own autonomy, and above all their own working dynamics, but they should also be linked (see Table 1).

On the other hand, another task was the process of review of the twelve sectoral councils and the Social Council<sup>3</sup>, which was carried out with civil society associations, specialists, and politicians from the opposition and from the government. The administration and organised

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<sup>3</sup> The Social Council is the coordination unit of the different structures and bodies for participation that exist in the city. In theory, it should be the central node of a governance network where representatives from all types

**Table 1: The participatory model designed in Donostia during the 2011–2015 legislative term**

<i>Areas/fields of political practice</i>	<i>Models of democracy</i>	<i>Actions</i>
Representative	Representative democracy	Control and accountability measures. Management transparency (ITA – Spanish index of city council transparency) Synergy in the administration.
Dialogic	Participatory democracy	Promotion of participatory processes. Collaboration with civil society initiatives.
Decision-making	Direct democracy	Regulation on non-referendum citizen consultations.

**Source: compiled by authors using data from the City Council of Donostia.**

citizens perceived the need to reformulate this model, which did not fulfil its initial goals and whose operation drifted towards clientelistic logics.

The Council on Equality has been a positive exception that reveals the democratic quality of the city’s governance networks. Combining the strategy of equality feminism to insert the gender perspective into the administrations and their public policies with women’s empowerment practices from difference feminism, this movement found a window of opportunity in the council. As one of its protagonists explained: “its origin has to do with the fact that at a given moment someone from the City Council gave impetus to a process with the associations and collectives that already existed, respecting their rhythms, their diversity...” (SA. 1). This two-way approach was crystallised in the creation, through a participatory process, of *La Casa de las Mujeres*; a space for meeting, debate, and reflection for women to be able to impact on policies and to encourage their participation and associations-based action in all areas of daily life. This participation in the creation of *La Casa* has continued through the development of a co-management model between the City Council and a women’s association created ad hoc for the project, that aspires to represent

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of associations, the private sector of the economy, the financial sector, public transport, public institutions, etc. meet.

the plurality of the feminist movement. *La Casa* aims to be “participative, transformative, innovative, plural, alive, open, educational, influential, non-partisan, solidarity-based, autonomous, and independent” (SA. 1).

In terms of transversal actions, the Citizen Participation Department has worked on specific training in participation with specialist staff from other departments, generating an internal communicative network composed of a participation specialist in every municipal department. As well as managing internal coordination, this specialist staff has participated in the decentralised meetings of the programme ‘Our Neighbourhoods and Towns Make Donostia Stronger’.

On the other hand, in terms of concrete participatory processes in recent years, the amount of significant experiences has decreased considerably. Some of the previous processes have lost strength, while new ones include urban planning linked to the process of canalisation of the Urumea river, the Friendly Donostia Plan developed from the perspective and with the participation of elderly people (both organised and non-organised groups), and the process of coordination of networks from a community perspective that is taking place in the old part of the city. Through the Council on Equality, Migration, and Youth, in collaboration with the Council on Participation, a participatory process has also been fostered for deciding on the uses of the publicly-owned abandoned building Villa Alegría-Txantxarreka in the Antiguo neighbourhood. This process culminated at the end of 2013 with the handover of the building to the neighbourhood’s *Gazte Asanblada* (young people’s assembly) and it is currently run by associations and social movements.

### III. Relations between the social fabric and the local administration

As we indicated at the beginning, the study of the relationship between the social movements and the public institutions forms the third part of this analysis of the city. In part the relationship derives from the logics of the public policies we have been describing, especially from the model of citizen participation that the administration has fostered. However, the configuration of the social movements, their goals, and their historical trajectory are also important elements that influence this relationship.

In this regard, and from the point of view of the research’s goals, we pose a double operational differentiation of the city’s social fabric, according to which we would distinguish, on the one hand, between the social movements that existed before the crisis and the ones that emerged after it; and, on the other hand, between the classic neighbourhood movement (represented by the different neighbourhood associations) and the social movements and social action organisations that have been working in the city for some years. The presence of new actors, as we will see next, is quite limited, although some have emerged that put precisely both the practices of participatory governance and the depth and reach of the social policies to the test.

The neighbourhood movement in Donostia is characterised by the significant atomisation of the different neighbourhood associations and, although certain relations have always existed, more stable collaborative spaces were not created until the last legislative term governed by Bildu. This has to do with the character and history of the city, where industrial

and urban development have been very uneven between zones. The centre and the neighbourhoods close to the coast have always been focused on tourism and the services sector. However, the peripheral neighbourhoods have tended to live far from that reality, dominated by an industrial landscape, at times mixed with a rural one, and in most cases partially or totally disconnected from the centre. The most extreme examples of disconnection are the strictly rural areas that still persist within the geographical limits of the municipality, in some cases as enclaves with no connection with the rest of the territory. All of this explains why such limited collective awareness of the city has been generated and, in some historical moments, even conflict between peripheral areas and the city centre.

Since the 1990s, the situation of the peripheral neighbourhoods has improved noticeably. New services and improvements reached them, the city began to expand, and some neighbourhoods that had been disconnected became connected. This facilitated demobilisation, but in general the weakening of the neighbourhood associations movement had more to do with the lack of a generational ‘changing of the guards’. However, in the neighbourhoods that have experienced a ‘rejuvenation’ of the population and/or that still show deficiencies in services or serious problems related to urbanism (for example, in the basin of the Urumea river where there are periodical floods), the neighbourhood movement has to some extent recovered, although in most cases in a reactive way.

On the other hand, there is also a part of the neighbourhood movement (the most active in recent years) that recognised a political understanding with the Bildu government, which facilitated shared experiences and processes in the neighbourhoods that had the support and even the subsidisation of the City Council and the Provincial Council, but which lost strength once left in the hands of the citizens.

Something similar happened with the Alza Community Plan (Telleria, 2008), which has lost steam because of the weakness and exhaustion of the neighbourhood movement itself and because the City Council, once it launched the project, could not eternally provide economic resources for its management via external intervention. A similar example is the Martutene neighbourhood, where for approximately eight years external agents were hired to foster a community development project that ended when Bildu came to power. In light of this, the municipal government team promoted a process of collective reflection with the neighbourhood movement and dynamised by the Citizen Participation Department. The goal was to redefine the movement and guide its work and its role in the social and political dynamics of the city in a more appropriate way: “in relation to the associations movement, we’re like facilitators trying to provide them with the tools, the relationships that they may need to improve communication between them” (SS. 1).

With this goal, in 2013 the City Council created the *Auzo Elkarteen Bilgunea* (meeting place for neighbourhood associations), without regulating it so as not to constrain its evolution.

‘With this group, the first thing they said to us was that it’s great that the relationships are better [with the administration], but that they also needed to take a look at themselves, that they didn’t even know where their evolution had taken them, why

they were there, what they were doing, and how they were doing; then what we did was facilitate a space with specialist support to work with them in this regard' (SS. 2).

The associations made a very positive assessment of it. Therefore, in 2015 they decided to become a forum to gain autonomy from the City Council and thus not depend on the possible changes of government and political interests. In addition, within the framework of the project *Donostia Berritzen* (Renovating Donostia), geared towards issues of infrastructure and maintenance, the City Council had a meeting every week in a neighbourhood of the city with the councillors and specialist staff from the department involved, the participation representatives in the neighbourhood, and the neighbourhood association.

With regard to the social movements and social action groups (third sector) that were already active in the city, it is worth highlighting that "the movements in the social fabric that work in the area of basic needs and with groups that suffer the crisis the most have gained strength" (SS. 1). Among these groups we find *Cáritas Diocesana*, *RAIS* (Support Network for Labour Integration), *Arrats* (comprehensive services for prisoners and ex-prisoners), *Emáus* (work in the field of social inclusion), *Kolore Guztiak* (work with unaccompanied foreign minors), *Red Cross*... They are groups that to a large extent already worked in networks before the crisis (which to a certain extent has intensified their relationships in recent years), although the collaboration does not go beyond better management of the resources and services they provide. In general, they are sceptical of the new institutional participatory spaces and they criticise their lack of adaptation to the needs of the people they work with: "I wonder if these tools and means are really adapted to all people and all citizens, I mean in terms of opening hours, advertising, languages... are we facilitating the everyone's participation?" (SA. 2).

For their part, the political officials from the Department of Social Welfare, Cooperation, and Mobility highlight that the third sector is very diverse, stressing how some organisations do important and very efficient work offering types of assistance that are not considered a public service and that would cost them a lot of resources if they had to offer them.

However, the government team's position on the relationship with some social action collectives is critical: "the third sector has been captured by the administration and, vice versa, the public administration has also been captured by the third sector, because it's much easier for them to delegate to us rather than assume their public responsibility" (PM. 2). Against this trend, the councillor made his principles clear indicating that "private initiatives are good, as long as the public administration guarantees the rights that correspond to the citizen" (PM. 2). In this regard, he revealed his doubts "on co-management, some services like La Casa de las Mujeres are a very effective tool (...) but there are issues that should be managed directly by civil servants, in fact, the service would deteriorate if this wasn't the case" (PM. 2). The basic idea he expressed was that the administration has to attend to its duties as a public service without delegating to third parties through subsidies. He was especially critical of the agreements that, according to him, greatly limit the control and accountability of the service on the part of the administration, since in this scenario the subsidised association has significant autonomy in the design of the service and in the use of the public funds received. On this point, he

reiterated his support for regulating the rights and policies properly, and in cases of externalisation of the service, he considered that it should be tendered out.

It is possible that this attitude of the government team has led to some small frictions with part of the third sector. For example, some associations created food services for people in need or carried out food deliveries that the City Council has tried to avoid subsidising, resulting in some protests and echoes in the media. The response of the department in this regard was clear, affirming that the City Council's role was to give money directly to families in need so that they could spend it as they saw fit and avoid exposing themselves socially, since from the social rights point of view, it could cause a feeling of inferiority and even humiliation.

It is not easy to identify new social actors that have emerged since the crisis in Donostia, although there are some movements and concrete expressions that, as we said, not only put the mechanisms of governance themselves to the test, but also the effectiveness and real commitment of the institutions towards certain social policies. Specifically, *Stop Desahucios* (Stop Evictions) and Duintasuna Elkarte (Pensioners' Platform) are the two most active groups at the city level. The former emerged closely linked to the cycle of protests generated by the 15M and within the framework of the state-wide coordination of the PAH (Platform of Mortgage Victims). As well as the advice they offer to those affected, in terms of mobilisation, one important campaign was the collection of signatures for the popular legislative initiative that took place between 2012 and 2013 where they achieved significant support (much greater than what the legal process required for such an initiative in the province of Gipuzkoa). Another line of work for the Platform has been the promotion of motions in the city councils, urging them to take action against the banking institutions that carry out evictions in their municipalities, and the response from the political parties in Gipuzkoa, except for the PP, has been positive, with many of the motions being passed. However, as the Platform warns, and also referring to Donostia where several institutional declarations have been approved in this regard: “[...] *what's missing are active policies that implement these motions*” (SA. 4). More specifically, the Platform's assessment of the current municipal government is that it is more open and shows greater receptiveness to their demands, collaborating with and facilitating the group's activities, but in terms of concrete policies they call for greater commitment through tangible measures.

Specifically, these groups demand concrete measures from the administrations to further regulate the actions of financial institutions. This is a complex issue from the point of view of municipal competences. However, the critical position of the City Council of Donostia and the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (both governed by Bildu during the period 2011–2015) in the process of privatisation of Kutxabank (banking foundation that emerged from the old provincial savings banks), asking for greater public control and taking actions against evictions, corresponds with the demands of these groups. Although we have not carried out a substantive analysis of these policies, issues such as these, added to the supplementation of the Social Emergency Aid scheme covered by the municipal budget (even though it does not correspond to it as a legal responsibility), reveal how the local government has acted against the scalar dumping that we mentioned earlier as one of the strategies of austerity urbanism.

This brief overview of the participatory policies and some social policies, together with the short description we provided of the social movements, allows us reach some conclusions on the relationships between the agents in the territory. We can confirm that the existing relationships are characterised by mutual respect and collaboration, with prior and current spaces and experiences that allow for the consolidation of this dynamic. The more limited impact of the crisis on the city has also generated less conflict, and although the relations with groups that have emerged since the crisis are still too recent, it seems that there is room for dialogue. However, from the point of view of the social movements, we can detect a lack of autonomy in relation to the institutional dynamics and actions that reveals their weakness.

## Conclusions

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As our main focus, we have considered the responses of the different agents in Donostia to the crisis, in a double analysis of the local administration and of the social movements in the city. The goal, in line with the research in which this paper is framed, involved identifying the transformations or changes of direction in the dynamics of participatory governance and we believe we have confirmed some significant changes that we will summarise in these conclusions.

In Donostia, despite the change of government that took place in 2011, we maintain (according to the first hypothesis of our study) that we are facing a 'scenario of consolidation, according to which local actors and in particular local governments understand that the context of the current crisis demands extending and deepening practices of participatory governance' (Davies and Blanco, 2014). The conclusion is that closer relationships generate a greater capacity to respond to the crisis through participatory governance, although we must point out that from a comparative point of view, the impact of the crisis is more limited in Donostia than in other cities in the country, while at the same time the social movements are also less anti-establishment. In this sense, it seems that the consolidation responds less to the search for a response to the crisis and more to the ideological change in the government, which shifted from centre-left to more leftist. Clearly this change is not exactly radical and in a way it deepens a prior trend. Since the pre-existing practices pointed towards a participatory governance model of greater democratic quality, we could be optimistic with regard to its future consolidation.

Consequently, we can see that the process of neoliberalisation in Donostia has been significantly different to the rest of the cities in the country (including the two other province capitals in the Basque Country). We identify an institutional landscape (the governments' orientation and the participatory tradition), an economic landscape (lower impact of the crisis and greater social cohesion), and a social landscape (a certain weakness and dependency of the civil society associations) that influence the governance model that has developed in the city. That is, the inter-jurisdictional policy transfer linked to governance presents some significant variegated elements.

More specifically, if we apply Sorensen and Torfing's model to the governance networks in Donostia, we would have to highlight that in the field of effectiveness, the current system's

greatest weakness lies in the scope of the policies. The governance networks are still framed within social and cultural policies, and although they are starting to be applied to urban planning, their real effectiveness can still not be evaluated. The greater complexity of these policies, in which the interests of actors from the business sector or from civil society show greater degrees of conflict, will be the real challenge for deepening the city's participatory model.

With regard to the democratic quality criteria, the weak point lies in the lack of diversity of actors participating in the networks. The end of the armed conflict and the important steps taken in recent years in matters of reconciliation and coexistence are influencing political normalisation and we can also start to see positive signs in the dynamics of participatory processes. Nevertheless, participation continues to be driven mainly by people that form part of the associations network, with a similar profile from the socio-economic and political integration point of view. The explanation could lie in the 'classic' format of the meetings (times, places, methodology, forms of announcement...), which seems to be the most comfortable for social agents and citizens with a greater participatory tradition, who do not tend to be socio-economically and/or politically excluded. In the absence of an in-depth study on the profiles, the interviewees both from the administration and the social fabric recognised that there are social groups (especially young people and immigrants) that do not participate in these spaces.

Speaking of participation, the limited impact of the new social movements in Donostia draws our attention. And even more so taking into account the breakthrough they have had in other parts of Spain. The answer may be that made-to-measure neoliberalism that deteriorates pre-existing social and organisational structures creates the structure of political opportunity for the creation of new forms of governance, organisation, and forms of acting among civil society associations. Nevertheless, the wave of neoliberalism is weaker in the Basque Country, which has a better-preserved welfare state than in Spain, higher per capita income, and noticeably lower rates of inequality. All of this facilitates the preservation of social and relational structures both in the institutions and in civil society, which impedes abrupt changes and at most results in slow transitions. This process is aided by the degree of penetration of the political parties in Basque society, which is socio-politically quite segmented and organised around the political parties who have influence in other spheres such as the media, trade unions, associations, etc. Nevertheless, the fading of this model has begun, although it still maintains force and influence.

All of this leads us to highlight the ideological orientation of the party in power (Spanish nationalist centre-left and sovereignist left) as the most influential factor in the type of institutional responses that have emerged to the crisis, both in terms of participatory policies and social policies. Maintaining or deepening the dynamics of participatory governance and the philosophy of social policy as a right is, therefore, a political option that is being consolidated in Donostia, but we also verify how it is being dismantled in the cities around it like Bilbao or Vitoria-Gasteiz due to the political allegiance (political interests) of those in government.

In short, we find ourselves before a city with a weak social fabric, but with a significant participatory tradition in the institutional sphere that in recent years has been advancing

through the dynamics of democratic deepening. It is clear that there is significant room for improvement, especially in the scope of the public policies affected by participation, but it also seems clear that, regardless of different approaches, the participatory culture is well-established in the ways of doing politics in the Gipuzkoan capital.

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