



Squeezing collaborative governance into presidential city politics: the case of Lleida

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Cover photo by Sergi Queralt. 'Mayor Ros arguing, megaphone in hand, with members of the PAH, Lleida.' *NacióLleida*, June 18, 2016.

<http://www.naciodigital.cat/lleida/noticia/18315/enfrontament/verbal/entre/angel/ros/membres/pah/lleida>

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

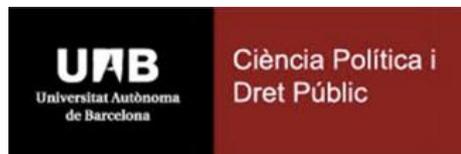
The TRANSGOB project addresses the impact of the economic crisis on forms of urban governance in Spain, contrasting the Spanish experience with that of the United Kingdom. It aims to analyse how practices of participative governance are evolving and their future prospects in a context marked by budget 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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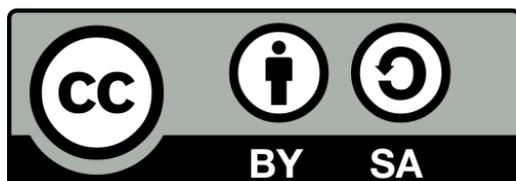
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Introduction

The present report reflects the results of one of six case studies included in the TRANSGOB project, which encompassed three Spanish and two British cities. The aim of this project was to elucidate how collaborative governance had fared in those cities along the period 2011-2015, strongly influenced by the effects of recession and austerity. The theoretical framework provided a heuristic tool, in the form of four conjectures of change in collaborative governance patterns: continuity (no quantitative or qualitative change), enhancement (quantitative growth), retrenchment (quantitative reduction or outright rejection) and innovation (qualitative growth).

Within the Spanish context, the case of Lleida, a modest provincial capital situated in Western Catalonia, was chosen because it was one of the very few leftist municipal governments that resisted the right wing wave of 2011. After the review of some secondary sources - mainly press articles, institutional reports and recorded political speech - it became evident that Lleidan local politics fell into what could be labelled as a paradigmatic case (Flyvbjerg 2006) of 'presidentialist' governance embedded in formal and informal arrangements of collaborative governance. As will be shown below, Lleida has both a remarkably strong, enduring and personalized political leadership, on the one side, and a quite developed collaborative governance framework, on the other side. Presidentialism is not the only relevant factor, but we deem that, in this case, it is a distinctive and rather decisive one. Therefore it makes sense to explain the configuration and evolution of local governance – and specifically of collaborative governance - in constant reference to the current mayor of Lleida¹.

Most scholars seem to agree that contemporary local government needs both strong leadership *and* a collaborative approach. Some see this relationship as unproblematic, or even as mutually reinforcing: the two sides of the very same 'good governance' coin. However, the concentration of power in one person that goes hand in hand with the strong leadership ideal raises reasonable doubts about the capacity of local government to sustain collaboration on equal footing. Paraphrasing Stone (1993), how can we make sure that the 'power to' intention will not be superseded by the 'power over' temptation? We think that dilemmas associated to this complex relationship merit close observation and analysis, and Lleida provides a good case to do this.

¹ Primary data was gathered for the case study, through 30 individual and three group interviews. A semi-structured questionnaire was passed on to six local politicians, of which three from the government and three from the opposition (LP1-LP6), four local non-elected officers (LO1-LO4), two locally based officers from the Catalan administration (RO1-RO2), five voluntary sector representatives (VS1-VS5), six activists involved in anti-austerity protests or other initiatives (AC1-AC6) and four experts from the University of Lleida (EX1-EX4). Six of these persons were interviewed in two occasions. Fieldwork was carried out between summer 2013 and summer 2015. In February 2016 we interviewed Dr. Angel Ros, mayor of Lleida (MAR). Interviews were coded to the concepts associated to municipal (e.g. mayoral) leadership and to collaborative governance.

In the next section of the report we dig into the theoretical discussion on the relationship between leadership and collaborative governance. It follows a depiction of the national and local context, putting the focus on the figure of Mr. Angel Ros, current Mayor of Lleida. As Kjaer (2013) contends, the study of local leadership involves the personal, the local and the wider social and institutional context. The second part of the report is devoted to the description of the whole array of collaborative arrangements put in place in Lleida in the last 30 years. While its first section provides a general approach, the second is focused on policy strongly related to the crisis years; attention to basic human needs. Under each heading clues for the explanation of either change or continuity are provided. The final section is devoted to a review and some concluding remarks.

Collaborative governance and strong leadership: complementary or contradictory?

Unlike the term participatory democracy, which is underpinned by strong normative considerations (Barber 1984), collaborative governance seems to follow a more sober functional rationale. Local governments increasingly need the collaboration of other actors, public and private, to attain substantial goals in economic development, social cohesion and quality of life (Fung 2015: 514). Several authors also assume that strong leadership is necessary for establishing such a model of governance (Borraz & John 2004). In a context characterized by growing fragmentation (functional, social, political) and diminishing integrative capacity of political parties, the leader can provide a legitimate ‘focal point’ (Elster 2007) that provides orientation and solves dilemmas and disputes between the many actors at play. Local leaders need to adapt to the emerging collaborative context, and be ready (and able) to work routinely across ideological, organizational and territorial boundaries (McNeill 2001a).

In their quest to demonstrate that leadership is more an ally than a rival of democratic local government, Bergström et al (2012) present three examples of leadership that effectively enhance engagement. At the same time they identify the risks implicit in strong leadership applied to local governance. It may happen that the demand of consensus - translated into a ‘rally around the mayor’ call - downplays real ideological differences, thus leading to a poor and frustrated public sphere. A critical means to avoid this is the preservation of spaces for the articulation and public representation of political difference and dissent. A more serious concern is that, when individuals become more important than institutions, the systemic checks and balances, necessary for achieving good governance (Hendriks 2013) may lose effectiveness. A strong leader can be more tempted to patronage and to clientelism if they expect to go unpunished. At the extreme, one cannot exclude ‘a charismatic catastrophe’ (Bergström et al 2012:142), unable to find a dignified end and an effective succession in office.

The social awareness of these risks may help to explain the somewhat schizophrenic state of contemporary governance, in which, amidst a pervasive personalization of politics (Van Aelst et al 2011) ‘there is a general call for leadership (...) and a general call for (...)

mechanisms controlling and curtailing the power of the powerful, that is, the leaders' (Kjaer 2015:575). In this context, leaders are eager to show 'that it is possible to demonstrate strong leadership within inclusive, consensual and collective decision-making mechanisms' (Bochel and Bochel (2010:731), and they often take great care to describe themselves as fitting in such a picture. The degree of honesty of these self-portraits is, however, a question that merits an empirically-based answer, case by case.

Considering the richness of political realities within and across cities, it is misleading to address local leadership from a monolithic, preconceived understanding. Haus and Sweeting (2006:271) consider that, as there are diverse approaches to local democracy - they differentiate between representative, user, network and participatory democracy - so local leaders can, under specific circumstances 'draw on elements of each form of democracy as appropriate'. Endorsing this idea, Kjaer (2013:257) adds that 'mayors might conduct different kinds of leadership in different situations' and that good leadership might even consist of the mayor's ability to switch styles according to context'. One could ask, however, to what extent this variegated conception of leadership entails the possibility - or even, at certain point, the need - of collective leadership. This is not a banal issue, if we take into account that many of the local government reforms in the past 30 years have consisted in strengthening individual leadership through the figure of the mayor.

We can provisionally conclude that, as effective democratic local governance requires both strong leadership and non-hierarchical multi-actor collaboration, there is a need to find arrangements that make both possible.

Local leadership and collaborative governance in Spain

Southern European municipalities are crucially dependent on collaborative governance to carry out their own policies, because they are comparatively poor in statutory competences and financial resources. The Spanish institutional design provides certain compensation for this weakness, precisely in the form of strong political leadership (Page 1991, Bäck et al 2006). Spanish mayors hold extensive formal powers (chair of the Council, CEO of the local administration and champion of the interests of the community) and the fact that they 'obtain their legitimacy through council appointment rather than through popular vote does not seem to matter' (Schaap et al 2009:246). They are expected to be the centrepiece of local politics (Sweeting 2009 and 2012) and get most of the media focus. In the '30 glorious years of Spanish local democracy'² (Cuenca Cervera 2015) many mayors acquired the status of city symbols and became apparently invincible at elections (McNeill 2001b). All this conferred on them a fair degree of decision-making autonomy vis-à-vis other actors,

² It refers to the period ranging from the recovery of democracy (1979) to the 'housing bubble' crash (2009), in which, among other things, municipalities benefited from economic growth and a significant inflow of European structural funds.

including their own political parties (Magre 1999). Political parties are, precisely, the other crucial actor of Spanish local democracy. Citizens elect a number of councillors through proportional suffrage, based on a closed and blocked party list. These constitute a parliament-like council which, in turn, elects the mayor among its members. Local politicians are normally expected to act as representatives of a political party, endowed with a specific ideology (Sweeting 2011).

Although grounded on an orthodox party-based representative system, Spanish local democracy incorporates specific participatory traditions. This is partly due to sheer proximity, and partly to specific historic events. Deeply politicised neighbourhood associations (Martínez Muntada 2011) played a very important role in the fight for democracy in the 1970s, and the leftist parties that took power in most cities a decade later endorsed strong ideas about citizen engagement and the role of social organizations in the management of the city affairs. Since then city governments have carried out a range of initiatives to enhance participation, starting with its formalization through city ordinances. This was followed by new participatory formats (Font et al 2000), new collaborative approaches to local policies (Gomà & Blanco 2002) and an exponential growth of human and organizational resources devoted to citizen participation in the municipalities (Salvador & Ramió 2012). However, lacking a clear statutory mandate, the deployment of these policies has been unequal between municipalities and selective within them. Moreover, their results have often been disappointing (Herrero & Ajángiz 2007, Font & Navarro 2013). As commonly experienced elsewhere, in Spanish cities representation has come to be seen more 'as a barrier, rather than a bridge' (Schaap et al. 2012:192), but participatory democracy has so far failed to become a real challenge to representative institutions (Ringeling et al. 2012). More critical analysts hold a crude vision of collaborative governance. They see local party elites shaping and dosing 'participation' according to their interests (Ruano 2010) and (taking into account that above everything parties want to win elections) a common result is the creation of 'a system of clientelistic relationships between local associations and the municipal government' (Navarro & Aguiar 2000:109). In any case practices of collaborative governance were developed during a long wave of growth in public budgets and urban development in which the win-win logic was prevalent. The economic downturn and the social tensions that unfolded in Spain between 2008 and 2011 ended this model and raised fundamental questions about the contribution of collaborative governance to citizen participation and to the quality of democracy in general.

Local leadership in the city of Lleida

Lleida is a medium-sized city (140,000) settled on a relatively large municipal area (212 Sq. Km), still peppered with scattered settlements, orchards and croplands. This reflects the mainly agricultural character of the territory located between the metropolitan areas of Barcelona and Zaragoza, in which Lleida plays a key role as a provider of communication,

commerce and specialised services³. The increasing revenues of a highly competitive agro-business benefit the city, whereas the industrial sector is rather small, in spite of recent efforts to build on knowledge-based industries. The upward economic trend noted in the last 30 years has also been reflected in increasing population figures. Almost stagnant at around 110,000 for two decades (1981-2000), since the turn of the century Lleida has gained almost 30,000 new residents⁴. In net terms this increase is up to 80% due to the arrival of foreign immigration (La Caixa, 2013:10), which in 2011 constituted 22% of the total population. A very ancient city, endowed with the first Catalan university (1300 AD), Lleida underwent episodes of destruction and stagnation that left a pessimistic imprint in the collective self-understanding. In recent times, thanks to sustained demographic and urban development, it is acknowledged that Lleida has made a qualitative leap, and nowadays it enjoys virtually all the infrastructural and cultural attributes of a modern capital. Nonetheless, although the agro-business sector was one of the least affected by the economic downturn starting in 2008, the city couldn't avoid being severely hit. Unemployment figures climbed from 5.4% to 19.3% between 2007 and 2012 (El Perfil de la Ciutat: 54). Since 2011 the already overburdened municipal finances began to suffer. In 2012 the municipal debt amounted to more than 1,000 € per capita, clearly above the Spanish average of 776 €. Current municipal expenditures were frozen and public investment substantially reduced.

Politically, although - since the restoration of democracy in 1977 - Lleida's vote has leaned more to the right than average, in the local elections the Party of Catalan Socialists (PSC), federated with the Spanish Socialist and Workers Party (PSOE), has won all elections and controlled almost continuously the majority of the Council. Only in certain short periods did the PSC require the support of other, much smaller forces of the left. But if anything, what has characterized local politics of Lleida so far has been its identification with strong leaders. In three and a half decades Lleida has only known two mayors (Antoni Siurana from 1979 to 2003⁵; Angel Ros since 2004), who have managed to adapt to a seemingly hostile political landscape and establish themselves as undisputed leaders or even *makers* of the city. To achieve this, both mayors have played a similar political game, which entails keeping control of party and Council, taking an important role in Catalan politics - through the *cumul de mandats* - being active in the Spanish localist movement and, last but not least, adopting policy priorities and discourses that transcend established political and ideological lines.

³ The metropolitan area of Lleida extends to 149 municipalities and 5,543 SqKm, and its commercial area accounts for more than 500,000 people (La Caixa, 2013:23).

⁴ Lleida had a population growth rate of 11.2% in the period 2001-2006 and of 9.8% in the period 2007-2012, the highest rate among the 50 Spanish provincial capitals (La Caixa, 2013:7).

⁵ After the 1987 elections a coalition of right-wing parties elected Manel Oronich (CiU) as Mayor, but two years later Siurana succeeded in dividing them and regained the post through a motion of censure.

Mayor Ros, Princes *and* President?

In the fall of 2003 Àngel Ros appeared as the perfect candidate to replace long-serving Mayor Siurana. On the one hand, he has a classic party boss side. Politically socialized in the final years of the Franco dictatorship, as a student he was a militant of the then clandestine Catalan communist party (PSUC), but he turned to the socialists of PSC at a crucial point of the democratic transition (1978). Unlike other charismatic mayors, Mayor Ros is also the leader of his party. On the other hand, building on a PhD in Computer Science and a long career as manager in public and private organizations, Mayor Ros has given his administration a technocratic imprint, visible in the internal power conferred to managers and in the high numbers of private sector professionals that staff his cabinet and who consider themselves “not belonging to PSC, but to Ros” (LP1). Last, but not least, he has a strong communitarian profile, reflected not only in his personal allegiance to territorial (he founded a neighbourhood association), religious (he is a confessed Catholic) and sports organizations (Ruich 2007), but also in the belief “that as a public officer he must respond to everyone. Whether he takes dinner with employers, or a street club of few folks invites him, if he can, he attends” (EX3). He aims to be present in every public dimension of the city, and normally taking an active role as a producer and communicator of discourse. All this makes him almost omnipresent in the local public sphere, be it through classic or through new media. Along the years, in parallel to the city’s taking off, Lleidan politics has become ultra-personalized, which has resulted in the mayor becoming the target of both, hagiographic appraisal and visceral critique.

Ideologically, Mayor Ros has been suspected of playing the card of ‘Third Way’ politics to occupy the centre of the political spectrum. This argument is sustained by hard electoral data: Lleida’s electorate has an above average conservative vote and it is only in the local elections that the left has been able to win most of the time. In fact, his economic policy approach has been consistently and enthusiastically pro-growth, underpinned by an obsession for achieving new infrastructure for the city, particularly in the transportation and *knowledge* domains. But there has also been a strong commitment to public services, especially in the areas of education, employment and culture. Mayor Ros considers that “90% of the social problems can be solved through having a job” (MAR), but the city must also respond to the remaining 10%, through well-developed social services. To sum up, Mayor Ros’ electoral successes may be partly explained by his ability to be appreciated as a business champion *and* a community champion. The sum of these categories builds the third and crucial one: ‘Lleida champion’. Indeed, a last crucial trait of his politics is multi-scalar engagement and the drive to build ‘boundary spanning partnerships’ (Bradford 2015:2) that reinforce the economic and political position of his city.

As for the crucial question of local democracy, Mayor Ros has clear and rather coherent opinions, which we could identify and interpret from his own words. First and foremost he is convinced that the power to take decisions must remain always in the hands of elected officials. What is more, he favors a presidential model of governance and considers that the local government laws enable it. Ultimately, however, its feasibility will depend on the rapport of forces within the Council. The role of collaborative governance is to help the City Council to meet certain policy goals, especially the much-praised ‘social cohesion’. With the

pendulum of public opinion so inclined towards the side of citizen participation, it is inevitable that the City Council provides spaces for discussion with non-institutional actors, but it is neither practical nor necessary to offer it for every policy decision; certainly not for strategic decisions. He unconsciously referred to those limits when he stated “How do we build the Lleida of the people and *the details*? We do it with dialogue, negotiation and participation” (Ros 2005). Moreover, one should be clear about the fact that people willing to participate are a tiny minority, and that participatory bodies are routinely occupied and misused by members of the opposition parties. Transparency is necessary, but it should also have limits, because an excess of it can weaken the position of the public actors vis-a-vis private actors not subject to such obligations. Considered as a whole, this belief system builds a background that will help the reader to understand the evolution of collaborative governance between 2011 and 2015.

A turning point? The sweet-sour conjuncture of 2011

In the municipal elections of May 2011, contrary to the general trend in Spain and Catalonia (high fragmentation, presence of new parties and heavy losses by the socialist party, including strongholds like Barcelona), Mayor Ros succeeded in enlarging his absolute majority. An abstention above 50% and a fragmentation of the leftist options resulted in ceding all the municipal representation to just three parties. Moreover, the threshold of 5% of the votes resulted in 22% of them being left without formal representations and the PSC monopolizing the entire representation of the left. The electoral prize awarded to Ros responded, at least partly, to the recognition of the brilliant moment experienced by the city until the effects of the crisis became evident. Indeed, the level of investment had remained very high throughout the period 2007-2011 and Ros profited from several grand openings.

Since taking office (Ros) has earned the trust and sympathy of the citizens, who see him as the architect of the great urban change experienced by the city in recent years, with an investment of over 420 million euros and works as Gardeny technology Park, the design bridge Prince of Viana, the coverage of the railroad tracks and the Congress Palace of la Llotja. (El País, 23 May 2011)

With the governing party enjoying a strong majority, and facing a numerically and ideologically diminished opposition, Mayor Ros felt powerful enough to state that “Lleidans have told us they want a strong government and a strong city project”⁶. But this doesn't depict the whole picture. Just a week before the election something extraordinary had happened: hundreds of protesters against the political management of the crisis, mostly young, decided to camp in the Plaza Sol of Madrid, and protest camps were replicated in many Spanish cities. The 15M (or ‘Indignados’) movement wasn't very big in Lleida, but big enough to mark a turning point. Clumsy repressive movements to disband it were followed

⁶ El País, May 23rd, 2011.

by unprecedented demonstrations of protest, including the temporary occupation of public offices. The groups that openly questioned the current socio-economic and political structures had become visible and to a certain point also legitimated in the eyes of an increasingly critical mainstream. Aware of this, Mayor Ros stepped away from the repression card and switched to tactical ignoring. However, protest had found fertile ground in a pressing economic crisis, and it couldn't be dismissed so easily. A number of 15M activists, having gained knowledge, self-awareness, and organizational capacity, were able to articulate a systematic critique to Mayor Ros and his government, alleging that the biggest flaws were to be found precisely in the collaborative governance domain: favouritism towards business interests, unwillingness to engage in meaningful dialogue with the emerging urban movements and lack of transparency.

The transformations of collaborative governance across the crisis years

The bilateral collaboration tradition

After 1979 the symbolic recovery of the public space came hand in hand with an explosion of public activities, promoted by civic groups and associations, and backed by the City Council. The most popular of those activities soon became pillars of the contemporary Lleidan identity. As stated, citizen participation was deemed crucial as a tool for building much-needed social capital and the correlated concept of social cohesion⁷. From this emerged a model of collaborative governance, based on non-mandatory but regular support to a number of associations, either in cash or in kind, awarded in exchange for providing certain activities or services to the community. The approach is bilateral: each association negotiates directly with its sectoral councillor - or with the Mayor, if it is the case - the terms of its relationship with the municipality. There are winners and there are losers.

The most privileged partners of the local administration were the neighbourhood associations (NA). They had been for many years the symbolic and real core of collaborative governance in Lleida.

'In addition to the supportive attitude of individual people, Lleida has a social and neighbourly network that prevents social breakdown through the consolidation of personal and proximity relations (...) This is why neighbourhood and social care associations are so important. This is why each neighbourhood has social centres and sports facilities. Both are public centres of *participation...*' (Mayor Ros 2009).

⁷ There are different visions about the strength of civil society in Lleida. A recent study acknowledges the existence of 662 registered associations (Molina and Mayoral, 2012:24), but also that 61.7% of the population does not belong to any association (Molina and Mayoral, 2012:97).

What is more, lacking physical and sociological cohesion, Lleida “was built and has matured politically through its neighbourhoods” (EX1), to the point that NA used to provide a substantial part of the political personnel and they were the scenario of fights between political parties for their control. Today, nearly 40 NA cover the whole urban territory, providing certain social articulation and in a few cases sheltering the whole associative life of a neighbourhood. But most associations are suffering a slow but seemingly inevitable decline, caused by failed generational renewal and the incapacity to adapt to social change. The younger generations question the narrow territorial approach to engagement that justifies the existence of NA in the first place (Rodríguez Fernández 2011).

Actors representing economic interests are important partners for the City Council, too. Strong business sectors are well organized and have a place in the city debates about the economy, such as urban strategic planning. As for the trade unions, the two biggest unions (CCOO and UGT) almost monopolize labour representation and benefit directly from this role.

Following a law of 2000 the concession of grants was progressively formalized, although municipalities still enjoyed a great deal of discretion in this matter, for example through specific covenants. Why did social organizations accept this? According to Aguiar and Navarro, because ‘only the local government can deliver the local public goods and private goods they need (grants and quotas of power)’ (2000: 94). Culturally, the mayor’s or councillors’ discretion in deciding over grants and other supports responded to a still deep engrained conception of what ‘doing politics’ means. And these issues do not just relate to material support. Associative leaders are often beneficiaries of a bloated policy of municipal awards and recognitions, strategically dosed regarding beneficiaries and timing⁸. A member of the opposition comments on this:

‘In a debate I asked the mayor to let civil society breathe. Because I was looking... who is the president of that neighbourhood association? Who in that other organization? I kept digging, and they all had contacts with the City Council, with the Socialist Party, the UGT⁹ ... it is something more than coincidence’ (LP2).

The participatory bodies tradition

The traditional model of collaborative governance wasn’t seriously challenged until 2003. In that year, in the midst of growing political polarization, the PSC suffered a quite unexpected setback in favour of candidatures situated further to the left. A three-party socialist-led coalition was built, in which the eco-socialist junior partner (Initiative for Catalonia, ICV) assumed the participation portfolio. The citizen participation policy promoted by ICV was based on three elements: a ‘Municipal Charter for Citizen Participation and the

⁸ Very recently the opposition pressed and obtained a regulation of this activity, to prevent, among other things, the practice of increasing the number of awards in election years.

⁹ UGT (Unió General de Treballadors) is a union leaned to the PSC.

Enhancement of Democracy' (Ajuntament de Lleida 2004), which set the frame and the broad policy goals, a new Ordinance of Citizen Participation, approved in 2005 (Ajuntament de Lleida 2007), which set the formal rules, and a Strategic Plan of Citizen Participation (2006), which was expected to deliver a road map towards the mainstreaming of citizen participation across local policies. At the end of the day, all this formalization implied a rationalization effort, intended to reduce party political and personal discretion in this domain.

The Ordinance included a wide array of organs and tools, but until 2011 it was implemented only in the part referring to the creation of participatory councils. To the existing array of thematic 'sectoral' councils¹⁰ were added 12 'territorial' (district-based) participatory councils. These were composed of representatives of formally organized stakeholders, chaired by an appointed councillor and managed by municipal staff. They implied the opening of the territorial participation to all kinds of associations, thus breaking the virtual monopoly held until then by the NA.

'It was actually a very interesting formula. In some places it came out better than in others, depending on the nature of the councillor and of the network of associations existing in the neighbourhood (...) The councillor of the historic centre began a very interesting line of work, to sit at the same table all the neighbourhood associations, the managers of public facilities, etc. That alone was valuable in itself' (EX2).

In fact, much depended on the neighbourhood councillor who chaired the territorial council. Through the Citizen Participation (CP) Ordinance, local government councillors were attributed the double role of representing the neighbours of an area before the government¹¹ and vice versa, thus acting as 'democratic facilitators' (Barnett, 2011:277) on the ground. Unfortunately, self-confident and autonomous councillors seem to have been more the exception than the rule:

'OK, Mayor Ros is very individualistic, as it is the case of any leader who is ambitious and wants to achieve and maintain power. But when he builds a team and trusts these people, the team has to say, "okay, then I am entitled to say 'hey, Angel (Ros), I don't agree with that'". (...) This starts here. But if a councillor only thinks that he has been put on the (election) list, and from there on "absolute obedience" (...) this guy does not believe in participation!' (EX3)

Electoral factors may also help to explain the fate of the CP Ordinance in general and the participatory bodies in particular. In 2007 the PSC regained the absolute majority in the City Council and ICV lost almost all councillors. The new government assumed the formal structures, but apparently not the ideals that had inspired them. One of the experts who

¹⁰ At present the list of sectoral councils encompasses the following 12: Women, Elderly people, Disabled People, Children and teenagers, Education, Social and Economic, Environment (Agenda 21), International Cooperation, Religion, Popular Culture and Festivities.

¹¹ This figure could also be seen as a way to compensate for one of the main weaknesses of the electoral system used in Spanish local elections: namely the non-existing correspondence between elected councillors and districts/neighbourhoods.

had been involved in the whole formalization process expresses his frustration in harsh terms:

'I invited the new councillor delegated for citizen participation to come to talk to my students and he said it was all nonsense (...) It comes as no surprise that citizen participation structures lack any appeal and credibility' (EX3).

From then on participatory bodies were understood by the City Council as 'a tool to be more effective in its leadership and referee roles' (LO1), always in a quest for appeasement and consensus¹². This was certainly not what other actors had expected:

'numerous advisory bodies have been created only to inform. It is much for posturing (...) not to collect the opinions of the actors, but to make sure that the political power, be it the councillor or the mayor, explains what he is doing' (LP3).

Regarding the results of this practice, official figures speak of an annual attendance of 600 people representing 296 associations (Ros 2013), but there is a general perception of failure. Councillors may have turned most participatory bodies into zombies through purposelessness and boredom.

Another contested issue concerned the policy domains that fell outside the participatory bodies approach. It is significant that, until very recently, the advisory body for the city development plan had an extremely restrictive composition, which excluded social organizations. That is, the business and professional interests involved in urban and housing development were spared from sharing a discussion arena with other actors. The impact of the crisis on the housing sector helped to break this taboo. The steady stream of foreclosures (between 3 and 6 administrative cases in the most intense phase) generated a strong social demand that the City Council should become more active in social housing matters. In January 2013 the Council created a specific office to assist people with problems paying the mortgage and rent, and a participatory body to promote and guarantee housing rights, which came to be known as the 'emergency committee'. It is made up of 26 organizations, including governmental actors, professional associations, banks, unions, social organizations and the administration of justice. The committee has made visible the confrontation of interests around these issues, but the social organizations that pressed for its constitution soon discovered the limits of this approach: the more actors you include in a participatory body, the less operational it becomes in terms of policy discussion and development.

¹² The link between participation and consensus is very frequent. In his first annual speech to the journalists Ros spoke about "...a (city) project that must collect all the citizens' criteria, to achieve consensus from which to become stronger in an open and competitive society" (Ros 2004).

The participatory processes tradition

Compared to participatory bodies, participatory processes have the advantage that they demand from the people a limited time commitment and their aim is usually clear and specific. They are also potentially more open to unmediated individual participation. Therefore they raise more public interest, but they also entail, for the City Council, a bigger risk of getting public criticism. Lleida has been well represented in this tradition. Participatory processes abounded in the context of growth, in which debates were about new public spaces or new facilities.

‘Here we tested, before the crisis, all kinds of participatory approaches to urban planning. The Map of Gulliver (...) School workshops to design a square. There have been thousands of participatory decisions and the neighbourhoods have responded. All this was before the CP Ordinance, directly with the associations. True, this is a city in which proximity makes it easier, not the process, but talking about specific things’ (EX1).

Participatory processes had been always proposed and framed by the City Council, but things changed in 2011, when a small party from the extreme left and not represented in the Council found out that the CP Ordinance envisaged models of participatory processes which hadn’t been used at that point. Frustrated with their recent experience in the territorial councils, the CUP ostensibly abandoned them, and instead promoted public hearings on planning (2012) and on public service privatization (2014). This process was provided for in the Citizen Participation Ordinance, but had never been put into practice. According to the promoters, when they delivered the request, the Municipal Government made use of all possible excuses and tricks to prevent, delay and downsize the process, but had to accede, because the Ordinance was legally binding. The three hearings attained considerable support from the civil society and a high level of public attention. However, not everyone agreed on their usefulness. Government officials stated that it was all about party political profiling, with no real alternatives being proposed, while for the more critical social activists, hearings meant just wearisome talk that would result in relatively little action. Moreover, the City Council controlled the process and the environment (government officials were placed on a dais and the mayor opened and closed the session), so that hardly anyone succeeded in getting to the root of the proposed questions. Nonetheless, public hearings may be worth the effort if understood as exercises of (forced) transparency, which is no small improvement.

The transparency (non)tradition

In Lleida local politics and administration have traditionally been no better than average in terms of their transparency; perhaps somewhat worse. In 2014 an extensive academic report on the participation-friendliness of the municipal websites in Catalonia placed Lleida

at number 22 in a total of 23 cities bigger than 50.000 inhabitants¹³. The contents of the website devoted to citizen participation¹⁴ were remarkably poor. The information about participatory activities (councils and processes) could not be easily found, and it was always scarce. The interventions of non-municipal actors were notable by their exclusion. The sloppiness of the government in addressing these issues generated suspicion concerning unproven rumours about hidden and possibly corrupt deals with private firms¹⁵. Even the relationship between the government and the opposition in the City Council suffered from the continuous delays and shortcomings in the provision of municipal information. After reaching a high level of tension in the electoral term between 2007-2011 the situation improved in the period 2011-2015, "if only because of the increased political and social pressure" (LP2).

Social collaboration with the government is based on shared understandings and a fair degree of trust; the critical urban activism that crystalized after 2011 lacked both. And there could be no trust as long as the government remained opaque in many crucial points. As the traditional local media were deemed to be submissive to political power and unable to do the task of forcing transparency, some activists with journalistic background began to produce alternative information, often with the explicit purpose of making a critical appraisal of local politics. Another group started broadcasting the Municipal Council's plenary sessions through live video streaming¹⁶ and they made use of the social media to ask Mayor Ros inconvenient questions. These initiatives were economically fragile and sometimes short-lived, but they had the effect of galvanizing the non-institutional opposition and of putting the transparency issue in the centre of the public debate.

Embedded subcase: The evolution of collaborative governance in the area of social policies and basic needs

'A progressive social policy, both in times of crisis and in times of prosperity, is characterized by its vocation to universality, i.e. that everyone can access it'. (...) 'Lleida has a long tradition of solidarity that has endured over time and allows us, today, to cover many of the needs of our citizens most vulnerable to poverty' (Mayor Ros 2009).

¹³ <http://mapainfoparticipa.com/es/informe/informe-sobre-la-informaci%C3%B3n-publicada-en-las-webs-de-los-ayuntamientos-de-los-947>

¹⁴ <http://www.lleidaparticipa.cat/>

¹⁵ A credit to Mayor Ros is that he has never been involved in a corruption scandal.

¹⁶ <http://lleidaallioi.blogspot.com/>

Unmet basic needs and ensuing institutional and social responses

Since the outbreak of the social crisis the two ideas most repeated by Mayor Ros have been that job creation is the best social policy and that the city must do whatever it deems necessary to preserve social cohesion. Breaking just once the habit of delivering optimistic discourses, in 2009, when assessing the state of the city, he sent two messages: 1). The municipality was prepared to respond, but 2). The help of social organizations would be more necessary than ever. Both points proved to be approximately true.

Employing a total of 286 professionals (Ajuntament de Lleida 2012:9-10), the municipal social services have enjoyed, at least in the most recent times, a highly professionalized personnel and a solid leadership. In financial terms this area has been spared from the worst of cuts. In fact, since 2011, the Municipality has managed to keep the same budget with a total budget for social services of 10.48 million € in 2012 (Ajuntament de Lleida 2012:53) and all the basic services and benefits have been maintained¹⁷.

After an extreme inflow in the years 2009-2010, the number of users of social services stabilized at around 20% of the total population, including 28% of the children and of elderly people (Ajuntament de Lleida, 2012:12-13). Unemployment and poverty affected disproportionately specific social profiles (unskilled and temporary workers, foreigners), reflecting well established patterns of urban segregation as well (Bellet & Vilagrasa 2001). Before the crisis, in a context characterized by low levels of unemployment and strong family solidarities, the coverage of basic needs was a problem restricted to the deepest cases of social exclusion, and particularly the persons affected by homelessness. In terms of relative fall or losses the crisis especially hit the middle to lower classes. In the event of weak family or social support networks, many of them have ended falling into poverty. For direct observers, this was a shocking event.

‘At the acutest point of the crisis, it was in autumn and we realized that people (that had suffered an eviction) came just with their summer clothes, and they didn’t have money to buy winter clothes’ (AC4).

External observers saw the municipal social services “completely overwhelmed” (EX2) by the situation. The response to this was to be found outside the City Council, and it required a fair deal of collaborative governance.

The bilateral collaboration tradition

The same bilateral, selective, personal and informal logic that we saw in the former section applies to this sector, even if it is one of the most professionalised. Mayor Ros is deemed to

¹⁷ However, one must take into account that local competences in social services are limited to first assistance, some basic services and the assessment for aid applications to higher level administrations. Stable financial aid (insertion or dependence...), as well as other key and cost intensive welfare services, such as health and specialized social services, are the competence of the Catalan regional administration, which has undertaken the biggest budget cuts.

be 'a man of dialogue, endowed with a social vision that allows him to anticipate potential conflicts' (EX4). But as far as he can, he decides who is an appropriate interlocutor and establishes the conditions of the dialogue.

'...there is a space (for bilateral talk) thanks to (...) one of the persons with whom the mayor has confidence to at least listen to them. He can tell the mayor all these things, and the mayor will reply "you're right, man!". Now, what he does afterwards ... I mean' (VS1).

It is not that he wouldn't hear or delegate to his political and technical staff, but he deploys an interventionist style, often deep into the details (Ruich 2007), and insists in having the last word in all relevant decisions.

'The mayor just knows everything that is going on, down and up (...) he is very clear about what he wants, and then sometimes he skips the structures, and what you have done to one side he speaks to another and it gets dismantled. Sometimes you're there, very quiet, to avoid getting slapped from all sides, because you do not know what is being negotiated, and it is not always completely open' (LO3).

Public officials recognize that, along the crisis, "the issues have changed more than the channels". What really works is "informal meetings, calls, empathy" (RO1). These things and a record of shared projects and activities confer on the long-term actors a key asset: trust.

But who are these actors? The organizations devoted to tackling social problems are numerous, although a few of them provide the largest part of non-public social care in Lleida. Of those, most belong to the Catholic Church. The Catholic faith is relatively strong in Lleida (Capdevila 2013:18), the city is the seat of a Bishop and the role of the church in education and social care cannot be downplayed. In this latter area there are two organizations, Arrels Sant Ignasi and Caritas, widely seen as pillars in the fight against social exclusion. They count on many volunteers and longstanding programmes, agreed and co-founded by the local and regional administrations. Failed revenues and delayed payments have put them into serious financial difficulties, until they were able to obtain more revenue from the wealthier classes. On the other hand, the crisis spurred the arrival or creation of charitable organizations linked to Protestant churches, whose approach to help is said to be devoid of social critique but filled with a good dose of proselytism.

On the side of lay organizations, a number of them, focused on immigration and extremely dependent on public funds, were unable to overcome the crisis. Conversely, many organizations of other domains - neighbourhoods, sports and others - in those troubled times decided to carry out their own initiatives to raise funds and deliver food to people in need. At the apex of the basic needs crisis, there are more than 50 basic food distribution points in Lleida. This meant a huge dispersion and heterogeneity in the service conditions, with some working on a strictly voluntary basis, and others in a highly professionalized way, including the local branch of the food bank.

As for the emerging organizations, linked to socio-political protest, their efforts in social care seem to have been scarce and tentative. They weren't able to find a niche of activism that at the same time would preserve the indispensable critical component. Their approach was

not local, but national or global, and their priority was not relief but awareness-raising¹⁸. First-hour hands-on activists from more established social organizations consider this approach “necessary but insufficient” (VS5). On the other hand, government officials hardly recognize them as legitimate interlocutors, and search for the classic actors instead. Why? Allegedly “because they have no leadership” (VS3).

The participatory bodies tradition

The Catalan Law of Social Services (2007) prescribes the creation of participatory social welfare councils in the municipalities. In Lleida it was created in 2012 (BOP, 2012), with the label ‘Lleida social’ and the ambition of integrating all stakeholders involved in the production of social welfare. In practice, its excessive size (more than 70 members), added to the lack of policy integration within the Municipal Government, have been detrimental to its effective functioning. Managers of both public and private welfare organizations consider that there is a great need for knowledge about the impacts of social programmes and about alternative courses of action, but they also agree also that big participatory bodies are not the right response to this. On the one hand, most associations seem to be focused in their (narrow) interests and apparently lack the capacity to make significant contributions in debates about social policies. The few associations that could do it apparently prefer “a debate in a small circle... or bilateral” (VS1), in which they can better present their case and eventually achieve practical results. All in all, this forum is not used to set policy priorities, not between the different social policy programmes, even less between social and other policy domains. The perception is of a useless talking shop:

‘The Welfare Council was created but nothing has materialized. There are several organizations, trade unions, professional associations (...) but, for the moment it is useless’ (VS3).

As we found in the former section, there were also unrealistic expectations of co-decision, combined with cumbersome and inconclusive deliberative processes, generating frustration among the participants (Michels & De Graaf 2010). Again, the City Council is not entirely to be blamed. “Sometimes personal prominence is at stake (...) There are people with a lot of ego, who speak simply to be heard and not want to sacrifice their “great” idea” (LO3).

Social services professionals and activists tend to prefer an essentially instrumental and pragmatic approach to participation. More than grand designs, what works are brief, perfectly tailored processes:

‘...when specific things were organized, in which people were offered to participate in this specific event, for this design of policies; (an event) which has clear goals, a beginning and an end... there has always been very good response, by the organizations and by the people’ (LO3).

¹⁸ With the notorious exception of the Platform of persons affected by mortgages (PAH), which created effective solidarity networks, albeit restricted to its associates.

The crux of hands-on collaborative governance is that it renounces challenge to the existing structures of power (De Vries 2008). This is reflected in the fact that the users of the services aren't involved in any meaningful way.

The networks tradition

Collaborative governance understood as collaborative doing is well-reflected in the practice of establishing multi-actor networks for the implementation of social programmes and projects.

In the context of the crisis the municipal Social Services promoted the creation of a network encompassing all local organizations caring for basic needs. Its main aim was to coordinate the actions of all the actors, through a single database (to make possible to know who is being attended by whom) and some shared quality (and dignity) criteria. For this purpose, the municipal Social Services made use of so-called territorial committees, in which professionals and volunteers working on an issue in the same neighbourhood shared knowledge and agreed on joint action. Besides basic needs, other committees have been created on childhood care and there was the intention to create a committee on elderly people. Another significant municipal programme of this area, not exactly network-creating but network reinforcing, consists in running of two pools of volunteers, one for youngsters and the other for elderly people. The alleged reason for this is that, increasingly, there are people who want to volunteer for social projects, but only on an occasional or very limited basis, and preferably dissociated from NGO membership. The Municipality is proud of having recruited more than 500 such volunteers, many of whom have been eventually involved in projects of the very same NGOs that, at the beginning, were rather reluctant about the programme.

Social organizations have also turned to the creation of networks. There have been the colourful protest *marees* (tides), created to defend public services against cuts, especially education (yellow), health (white) and social services (orange). Their force changed over time, in accordance to the degree of the perceived threat. The different movements joined in the Assembly for the Defence of Public Services¹⁹, with the highly significant absence of the two main trade unions (see above). On the other hand, to be more effective at facing the effects of the crisis - on society and on the organizations themselves - and at the same time claiming their identity as serious and not purely charitable care providers, in November 2013 nine organizations joined to create a Christian Network of Social Organizations.

A third interesting move is that the most progressive members of both worlds of social activism, the old and the new, the inward and the outward looking, the hands-on and the protest social organizations, created a meeting point from which to develop shared political stances and specific demands to the responsible institutions. Named Platform 3x4²⁰, it was constituted by the Catalan Federation of Social Volunteers, the Christian Network of Social

¹⁹ <http://serveispublicslleida.wordpress.com/>

²⁰ They stand for 3rd World and 4th World, meaning that all forms of poverty and exclusion matter.

Organizations and the Coordinator organization of NGOs. Even though it was not easy to find common ground, a first significant result was achieved in a campaign for ensuring medical assistance for irregular foreigners.

Lastly there is the social network created by the PAH of Lleida. This organization has been able to combine a pragmatic approach towards the pressing problems of the day (threat of eviction, lack of shelter) with an ambition to achieve political and institutional changes. To achieve its ends the PAH makes use of a broad array of tools, from self-help groups to occupations of unused housing estates owned by banks. It sees itself as a powerful and somehow unique participatory movement, both in quantitative and qualitative terms.

‘The PAH Lleida are currently 600 families (...) People who have never been involved, come to the platform and undergoing a deep process of politicization. I love to see the Facebooks of people entering the PAH. At the beginning everything was football, television, and gradually they were posting articles, photos about political questions (...) just new activists, eager to change everything, perhaps without so much intellectual basis as other movements, but it is very spontaneous, very grass roots; and the activist is not alone, she brings the family, talks with others ... and it mounts an incredible domino effect’ (AC4).

In **table 1** we present, in synthetic format, the results of our analysis of the changes experienced in collaborative governance processes in Lleida. The social policies subcase has allowed us to detect a slightly different evolution. One should bear in mind that the latter is an ideologically little-contested and managerially highly-structured sector.

Table 1: Evolution of collaborative governance patterns in Lleida (2011-2015)

Evolution pattern	General approach	Collaborative Governance in tackling basic needs
Continuity	Bilateral collaboration (clientelar relationships)	Bilateral collaboration (affinity relationships)
Retrenchment	Participatory bodies (territorial councils)	Participatory bodies (welfare council)
Enhancement	Participatory processes (public audiences)	Public-led networks (food provision network). Hands-on approach.
Innovation	Transparency (social initiatives for creating a critical public sphere).	Social-led networks (3x4 commission, catholic network, PAH). hands-on self-help + strategic.

Epilogue and conclusions

Mayor Ros accomplishes the criteria for successful local government leadership proposed by Bergström et al. (2012:122). He has a vision, he knows how to make himself visible, he has excellent communication capacities and he is a skilled coalition builder. However, this doesn't make him necessarily suited for collaborative governance, if we understand that this pre-supposes a certain degree of distributed leadership. Indeed, the assessment of his participatory record is not good. According to Parés et al (2012:263-264), Lleida should be counted among the 'municipal governments that perceive participation as an instrument to legitimize their urban planning schemes, investing more in propaganda and press conferences than in developing structured and open processes with real chances of influencing urban policies'.

Certainly, the efforts to profile itself as a participatory Council have not been negligible. Lleida even assumed the presidency of the International Observatory of Participatory Democracy (OPD) and hosted in 2011 an OPD sponsored International Conference on new technologies and civic participation. However, it would be unjust to reduce Ros' participatory policies to sheer rhetoric or political cynicism. Admittedly, he despises the participatory bodies that were imposed on him by junior coalition partners, but he has pursued his own approach to collaborative governance, purely instrumental, with selected topics, selected participants and selected procedures. What he aimed at, and often achieved, was 'to activate and co-ordinate the different resources and providers of the territory', so that *his* 'policies are more likely to have successful outcomes' (Andreotti et al 2012:1,936).

Ros is the youngest sibling and the last member of a mythical generation of strong mayors with strong ideas. But he is also a chameleonic politician, able to adapt as circumstances change. In the difficult period that stretches between 2011 and 2015, although the institutional framework of collaborative governance stood formally intact, there were some significant enhancements and innovations, mainly triggered by external actors. Mayor Ros first resisted, then accepted reluctantly and in a third stage co-opted these changes as if they had been proposed by him. Following conflict after conflict, he had become aware that budgetary austerity (less municipal action), political fragmentation (no absolute majorities), and political awareness (more accountability and transparency) were there to stay. All together they involved a bigger role for strong collaborative governance. In the speeches held in his re-election campaign in spring 2015 he was eager to show that he had understood the message: in any plausible future scenario, governance would have to be exercised hand to hand with the social movements.

'The city that we socialists have to develop, in addition to creating the future and ensuring welfare and coexistence, will have to progress in participation, deepening

democratic practice and adapting its systems and processes to the criteria of transparency in administration and governance that the citizens aspire to²¹.

Two unexpected events influenced the electoral turnout, probably cancelling each other out. On the one hand, the parties to the left of the PSC, the ones who had taken the participation flag, were unable to join into a single challenging candidature. Instead, there were four of them. On the other hand, a long-standing underhand conflict between Ros and his Deputy Mayor and would-be successor came to a bad end some weeks before the elections. The Deputy Mayor was fired and in turn she accused Mayor Ros of systematically benefiting from petty corruption²². Traumatic successions are a rather frequent price to be paid for exceptionally strong leaderships. The elections were a serious setback for the PSC. It lost almost half of its representation, from 15 to 8 councillors out of 27. Fortunately for Mayor Ros, the other parties weren't able to build an alternative majority and he managed to get re-elected. He governs with a very fragile minority, but applying a variable geometry approach he has been able to negotiate and reach crucial agreements with parties across the whole ideological spectrum.

However, his stepping down 'from Princeps to President' (Steyvers et al, 2008) might not be enough to guarantee a stable government. The movements that put participation and transparency onto the agenda are now in the Council, endowed with the legitimacy and the communication channels of the representative democracy. They are continuously challenging Mayor Ros and his government, testing his resilience and versatility. In the meantime he has accepted the introduction of the participatory budget (due in 2017), but he is at pains with the reform of the CP Ordinance and the adoption of strict transparency.

The crisis of the party-based representative democracy has only become deeper across Europe. The energy required to renew local democracy could come from a greater involvement of citizens, but in this event, as Ringeling contends, the 'elected representatives of society need to accept that it is not their task to BE the local democracy, but rather to guarantee its quality' (2012:204). Will Mayor Ros be able to go that far? And if yes, will this time a solo effort be enough?

²¹ Presentation of Mayor Ros candidacy to the nomination to the mayoral office by the PSC, March 6th 2014.

²² A few months later a judge dismissed all charges against Mayor Ros.

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