(e) Participation at the local level
Walking toward a collaborative democracy

(First installment – 2008.03.28)
(Updated 2008.05.08)

[Includes Chapter I: “Withered democracy”]

© Author: Pedro Prieto-Martín (Asociación Ciudades Kyosei) – pedro.prieto-martin @ ckyosei.org

Your suggestions to improve this English translation of the document are more than welcomed

PROVISIONAL VERSION, provided for public review and improvement, and to serve as a basis for the “participatory design process” of the Kyosei-Polis system. Comments and criticism, as well as proposals for translation to other languages, are thankfully welcomed.

If you want to review or cite this document, please use the following citation:


Once the text is completed, it will be distributed with a Creative Commons “Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 2.5 Spain” license. For more information on this license, visit the following Internet address: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/es/deed.en>
“What the caterpillar calls the end of the world
the Master calls a butterfly”

Richard Bach
Índice

INTRODUCCIÓN A LA PRIMERA ENTREGA .......................................................... 3

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST INSTALMENT ............................................. 4

CAPÍTULO I. WHITERED DEMOCRACY .......................................................... 6

1. The democracy’s old clothes ........................................................................ 6
2. Democratic institutions and political actors .................................................. 9
   2.1 Introduction to institutionalism ............................................................... 9
       2.1.1 The elite and shadowy institutions ................................................. 11
       2.1.2 Mechanisms of institutional evolution .......................................... 12
2.2 The “dark side” of the influence .................................................................. 15
   2.2.1 Elections and democratic distortion ............................................... 20
       2.2.2 Política representativa y esquizofrenia doblepensante ........... 24
3. El nudo gordiano de la democracia local ..................................................... 28
   3.1 El laberinto de lo local ........................................................................... 30
       Inmigración y disparidad social ............................................................ 30
       Boom inmobiliario y finanzas municipales ......................................... 31
       Clima político deteriorado ................................................................. 32
       Hostilidad institucional hacia la participación ciudadana ............... 33
       Tensiones territoriales e identitarias .................................................... 35
       Generalizada falta de cultura participativa en los municipios ........ 37
       ...el laberinto de seda ......................................................................... 39
   3.2 Gobernanza local y desarrollo democrático .......................................... 39

REFERENCIAS .................................................................................................. 44

1. BIBLIOGRAFÍA .............................................................................................. 44
Introduction to the first instalment

At some point in the future, this introduction will present the objectives and content of the book “(e)Participation at the local level: Walking toward a collaborative democracy”. Such an introduction will not be written, as is tradition, until the rest of the text has been completed. However, since we have decided to publicize the book chapter by chapter, as if it was a newspaper serial, we have to briefly introduce this first instalment.

The text you have before your eyes is part of an ambitious project developed by the Association “Ciudades Kyosei”, a Spanish non-profit organization committed to strengthening democratic citizen participation at the municipal and regional levels. We have set as our objective to create a Virtual System for Municipal Citizen Participation, which is based on Web2.0 concepts and technologies. This system will be able to accompany, enhance and invigorate all civic participation initiatives in a city –from the simplest to the most complex– and it will be usable both in “developed” and “developing” countries.

This system, which will be built as Free Software, will not only service the municipal authorities but also any institution or group that wants to profit from having citizen participation in any of its activities. Potential users of the system include, therefore, the municipal executive and legislative bodies, political parties, elected officials, unions, media, universities, schools, civic associations, citizen initiatives and the own individual citizens.

Since the system aims to exert an influence over such a complex social environment as our cities’ political and democratic institutional arrangements, it can not just provide a set of purely “technological” tools: they require to be fully integrated with the social processes and the environments in which the system will operate. The system needs therefore to fully consider the methodological, procedural and institutional aspects that will surround its utilization.
We soon realized that, unlike other free software projects, our system would require more than just a group of a computer "geeks" to build it. It demands a fully participatory design process, which included representatives from all groups and institutions that will use or be affected by the system. Each of them will thus provide us with his expertise and thorough knowledge of their own needs and skills, and of possible problems and ways to address them.

Our intention is to bring together people from the whole Latin America and engage them from the very beginning in the discussion and design of the system. And if they wish, they will stay for the later stages of construction, testing, utilization and continuous perfection of the system.

As part of this unusual participatory design process, the purpose of this text is twofold:

- Given that knowledge about e-Participation is generally quite scarce, the book aims to help potential contributors to get an accurate idea of what these new participatory tools and trends are, and how they will affect them in performing their functions. Thus, all participants will be equipped with an basic preliminary knowledge, and charged with a "positive" attitude towards e-Participation, which will enable them to perceive these changes not only as a threat but also as a great personal opportunity.

- We also hope that this book, being distributed by "stallments", will gradually establish itself, by word of mouth, as one popular reference book on the subject. This cold help bring more and more people –perhaps you, dear reader, who in some way are already accompanying us, by reading this text?– to engage with us and contribute to this ambitious and dreamy project.

Thus, without further delay... Let us start with the first chapter.
In this chapter we reflect on the serious legitimacy crisis that currently affects our democratic systems, with particular attention paid to the local level as a privileged space for democratic innovation, where tentative solutions to the crisis are being hatched. The challenges faced by the municipalities are fuelling there a transition from their traditional model of "bureaucratic government" to new models of "democratic governance", in which governments and public authorities hold a leading and mediating role between the various social actors. In this sense, it could be spoken about the emergence of a new form of "collaborative democracy" which, by opening up the political process to a continuous and close interaction between government and civil society, creates new forms of shared power, which make it possible to collaboratively tackle the growing social challenges.

1. THE DEMOCRACY’S OLD CLOTHES

“Sire, to me it matters not whose son I am, therefore I tell you that either I am blind or you are riding without any clothes”

(Don Juan Manuel, Count Lucanor. The Fifty Pleasant Stories of Patronio, 1335)

Never before had been so many countries in the world ruled by democratic governments. Nor was democracy, on the ideological level, ever so little challenged by rival political systems claiming to be alternatives to democracy. Among scholars, there seems to be consensus that liberal democracies provide their citizens with the highest levels of development and welfare. These facts might lead us to conclude that democracy proclaimed the clear winner of the ideological disputes that characterized much of the twentieth century.

However, most recent political literature agrees to declare that democracy,
LA DEMOCRACIA MARCHITA

as we know it today, is experiencing a serious identity crisis. Something that gets exposed by the fact that, both in countries with a long democratic tradition and in countries with young democracies, every day seems to rise the level of political discontent among their people. Discontent which doesn’t so much relate to citizens’ attachment to the democratic ideal and values, but to a growing mistrust and scepticism around its practical and institutional performance. In particular, there exist low levels of trust in democratic institutions such as parliaments or governments, and very low levels of trust in its main actors: political parties and politicians themselves. This disillusionment is especially reflected in low turnout in elections and the increasing difficulty for political parties to articulate and represent the interests and concerns of a society that rejects them.

From the field of political sociology several factors have been proposed to explain this distancing between the political system and its citizenship: the decline in the power of political institutions in the context of globalization; the emergence of a less ideological and more consensual form of politics; the appearance of a more active citizenship, which is much better educated, more demanding and less submissive to the political and administrative bodies; and the development of a more individualist, consumerist culture, which has eroded collective political identities. There is no doubt that these are real causes that help explain citizenship disengagement, but we do nevertheless believe its main causes, far from being exogenous, must be found within the political institutions, which have been unable to reform themselves and make people feel properly represented (Coleman 2005).

The truth is that, over the past two centuries, while there were extraordinary and substantial changes in almost all spheres of human activity, our democratic mechanisms have kept almost unchanged. Democracy, as we have so far known it, was a product of an age where effective representation was constrained both by the large differences in educational levels of the population, and the disconnections caused by rudimentary communication and transportation systems, which stressed the effect of geographical distances. Our parliamentary systems of government are founded, therefore, upon the idea of "remote representation", which reserves policy deliberation for the political elites, and leaves the public with the only job to vote for their legislators and then meekly withdraw until the next election (Coleman 2003).

Sixty years ago Winston Churchill said “democracy is the worst form of government, except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time”. But... is it not surprising that in the long half-century that has passed since, the man was able to walk on the moon but failed to make
improvements to democracy that would make it "good on their own" rather than simply "less bad than the others"?

So much so that, in those decades of rampant innovation, which have come to drastically transform our social, cultural and economic institutions, the only merit that could hardly be acknowledged to the political classes is to have "adapted" to the emergence of television as the dominant form of mass communication. This change has undoubtedly helped to increase the transparency and accessibility of political processes, but at the same time has led the transition to a new form of politics, the "politainment", whose speeches are fully adapted to entertainment industry’s formats, and are thus characterized by their superficiality. This turn to politainment has also promoted a strong marketing orientation of politics and a worrying collusion between political parties, media conglomerates and the corporations that own them. Nothing to do, therefore, with coming closer to that democratic ideal of political equality and popular control that citizens demand.

This estrangement between citizens’ wishes and politicians’ actions is causing growing demands from civil society, academia, political institutions and even some political parties, for a change in existing democratic structures. New institutional frameworks are required, which make active citizen involvement the basis for a continuous re-building of democracy (Porras 2005), and with mechanisms that, while preserving the representative framework, ensure that the public retains a degree of authority over representatives, even between elections (Coleman 2005).

The Council of Europe, an institution with 47 member-countries whose aims include the protection of human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law, recently stated, in one of its publications, that "the future of democracy in Europe lies less in fortifying and perpetuating existing formal institutions and informal practices than in changing them [...] In order to [...] sustain its legitimacy, democracy as we know it will have to change and to change significantly" (Schmitter and Trechsel 2004). In this sense, one of the working documents of its Ad hoc Committee on e-Democracy (2007), identified up to 43 deficiencies in current democratic practices, ranging from the limited influence that citizens have in policy decisions and the democratic deficit of international institutions and political parties, to the ineffectiveness of separation of powers and the lack of transparency and corruption of electoral systems, political institutions and the corporate sector. They also suggested up to 29 specific reforms that would help solve such problems (Council of Europe 2005), including such diverse recommendations as the extension of voting rights from the moment of birth, reform of electoral
systems to better reflect the preferences of voters or even holding a lottery among voters to allow the winners to award small budgets to entities and policies of their choice.

In Christian Andersen’s tale, a single child exclaiming "But he has nothing on!" made the crowd explode in a mocking outcry, which had the emperor ashamed forever and ever. Unfortunately, not what is happening now. The Council of Europe is just one among the hundreds of institutions who are respectfully noting that the once-flamboyant clothes of our democracies are, in these times, rather frayed and outdated. But most of the political class prefers to close their eyes to them and not acknowledge any problem. They ignore all recommendations for change and, as if considering themselves legitimated enough through the elections they passed, conceal themselves as the emperor in his imaginary suit.

To understand this unwillingness to change, we must examine our political system from an institutional perspective and thus deepen into the motivations—both declared and covert—which govern the functioning of our democratic institutions.

2. DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL ACTORS

"Men are powerless to secure the future; only institutions determine the destiny of nations"
(Napoleon, 1813)

Institutional analysis is one of the most valuable tools for understanding the functioning of our social, economic, political and organizational systems. Despite having its origins in the field of social sciences, in recent decades the Theory of Institutional Analysis has received fundamental contributions from the field of economics, especially through the work of Douglass North (1993), Nobel Laureate in Economics. This section will introduce some of its essential features, which will serve as a guide for our analysis throughout the book.

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO INSTITUTIONALISM

"Power has deeper roots and more durable structures than the governments that come and go at the pace of democratic elections"
(Eduardo Galeano, Upside Down: A primer for the Looking-Glass World, 1998)

According to institutional theory, social systems operate through the creation, maintenance and development of "institutions". Institutions are the
set of values, principles and rules governing the system, which determine the procedures and legitimate means for the strategic actors to relate to each other, resolve their conflicts and select and develop strategies to achieve their goals. Taking this into account, we could say that institutions are the "rules of the game" of social interaction, namely the framework of constraints and incentives that set out the standards for interaction between individuals and organizations.

As shown in Figure 1, the construction of this framework is produced by two distinct mechanisms. Institutions, on the one hand, from their role as the system’s sovereign principles and values, play an active role in shaping the preferences and interests of strategic actors, as well as in structuring their perceptual, discursive, mental and behavioural models. In other words: since institutions shape what the actors perceive and reason, they also help to mould their objectives and identities.

FIGURE 1. INSTITUCIONAL VIEW OF A SYSTEM OR ORGANIZATION

On the other hand, institutions establish and legitimize a series of...
mechanisms and processes through which the actors—who may be individuals, groups or organizations—will pursue their objectives, as well as accountability channels for the actors. These mechanisms are “privileged”, in the sense that their acceptance and use by the actors entails lower efforts and costs. If they opt for alternative behaviours, actors will need to overcome barriers and confront difficulties; in fact, along with the mechanisms certain “sanctions”—both symbolic and/or real—are also established, which apply to their offenders. Occasionally, organisms and agencies will also be created, which will favour compliance with the rules and an overall proper functioning of the system.

Regarding the nature of institutions, they can be of two types: formal and informal. Formal institutions correspond to the formal “rules of the game”, as legally or socially proclaimed: they are the laws and regulations. Informal institutions, for their part, are the rules as they are actually internalized and experienced: what the actors really feel and do. Typically, both types of institutions, formal and informal, are lined up, with informal ones serving to extend and nuance formal ones without contradicting them. However, in cases where they differ, informal institutions usually take precedence.

All these concepts can be visualized thinking about a soccer match. Soccer rules provide teams with the framework within which to define and pursue their winning strategies, and thus mould the behaviour pattern that goalkeepers, forward players, trainers and other relevant actors will have during the match. The rules will, however, get adjusted in practice according to certain informal patterns that, on the one hand make acceptable certain levels of “hard soccer”, but at the same time suppress and make appear as loathsome the desire to deliberately hurt the other team’s star, although this could lead to victory. The referees, for its part, ensure that rules are properly observed, applying appropriate sanctions.

2.1.1 THE ELITE AND SHADOWY INSTITUTIONS

“Laws: We know what they are, and what they are worth. They are spider webs for the rich and mighty, steel chains for the poor and weak, fishing nets in the hands of government”

(Pierre Joseph Proudhon, ~1840)

It is very important to note how institutions and the mechanisms and procedures that they define are not neutral but, in general, favour and benefit certain actors while, at the same time, harm and exclude others. This happens because institutions, while providing the basic framework for defining the identities and roles of the actors, and attributing them different
degrees of power, are also affected by the actions of these actors and by the power struggles they have with one another.

Those groups and organizations that occupy a leading position and have the ability to affect—be it alone or forming coalitions—the operation of the system and its institutional framework, are referred as the system’s "elite" or "strategic actors". Where possible, strategic actors seek to control and/or alter the existing institutional framework to favour their interests, to facilitate the achievement of their agendas and to propagate their own “worldview”.

In extreme circumstances, such as under a dictatorial regime, it is possible for the elite to subdue formal institutions to their very own interests, and thus dictate stigmatizing and oppressive laws. But under ordinary circumstances formal institutions require the general public approval to maintain its legitimacy, which leads them to warrant some minimum standards of fairness. In these cases, strategic actors have to resort to informal institutions to influence the functioning of the system to favour them. More specifically, they use what we have termed “shadowy institutions”. This subcategory of informal institutions has so far not received much attention from academics, but they are of vital importance because shadowy institutions are the ones that administer privileges and impunity in the system. They allow that, for some groups and organizations—usually the most powerful or the most excluded—the norms and values that supposedly govern the system are, de facto, not really in force. Although it is pretended that the well-intended "must be" dictated by the formal rules apply to everyone, informal and shadowy institutions prescribe what "really is."

In section 2.2 we will see how these shadowy institutions play an important role in the configuration and functioning of our contemporary democratic systems.

2.1.2 MECHANISMS OF INSTITUTIONAL EVOLUTION

“The twentieth century has been characterized by three developments of great political importance: the growth of democracy, the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy”

(Alex Carey, 1995)

The ultimate reason for being of institutions is to guarantee the survival and continuity of the social system or organization they belong to. In other words: institutions shape the social system in a way that enable it to positively cope, through the collective action of its actors, with the challenges and opportunities that emerge throughout time. These challenges might come
from external sources –from the environment in which the social system operates– as well as from internal changes and developments of the system. Consequently, the whole institutional framework will first and foremost seek to provide the system with an internal and external equilibrium. To achieve this, the routine interactions between the system’s actors should be configured in a way that, indirectly, produces stability for the system. Such stability will crucially depend on the institutional framework being able to provide (Vicente Navarro 2003):

- **efficiency** for strategic actors, in the pursuit and achievement of its objectives;
- **legitimacy** for the own institutional system, and for the roles and privileges that it attributes to the actors;
- **representativeness** for the groups and organisms integrated into the system.

The levels of each of these dimensions can vary widely from case to case. A dictatorship, for example, can be extremely effective in facilitating their elites pursuing their targets, but scores quite low in terms of legitimacy and representativeness. On the other hand, absolutist monarchical regimes of the Middle Ages, which resorted to religion to dominate their subjects’ morals, achieved high levels of legitimacy, though not being representative nor, necessarily, efficient.

In this context, it is important to understand that if any of these elements is missing the institutional system will tend to be more unstable and, therefore, its actors will have a higher motivation to attempt to change the system and thereby improve their situation. In fact, each technological, economic or social development –whether it is endogenous or exogenous to the system– generates a new scenario of opportunities and threats for the strategic actors, which changes their preferences’ frameworks, incentives and costs, and will sometimes result in institutional changes.

Institutional development is ordinarily slow and gradual. Nevertheless, it can also happen that, for some critical periods of time –and especially within systems that provide low levels of efficiency, legitimacy, representativeness and, consequently, a fragile stability– the changes accelerate and sudden and substantial transformations in the institutions, the balance of power and even the constellation of socially relevant actors, occur. These changes can result from a sudden and critical-incident –as a natural disaster or an external invasion– or from the accumulation of many small incremental...
changes, which were not adequately addressed by the system and end up undermining its stability.

Demands of institutional change will become articulated when a sufficient number of actors share the perception that the preservation of the status quo could not only lead them to lose in the future considerable potential benefits, but also seriously jeopardize their current benefits. Additionally, it will require the emergence of new leaders within the various relevant social groups and organizations, which will challenge the existing situation. These leaders must be able to articulate a vision and a “workable agenda for change” that are supported by a coalition broad, strong and durable enough as to properly work out the tensions and resistances that will emerge (Prats I Català 2003) when the strategic actors that feel threatened by the change try to impose a reading of the changes consistent with maintaining the status quo, dramatizing the costs and minimizing the expected benefits resulting from the change (North 1993).

Considering all the above, we must finally mention that our modern democratic societies are nowadays experiencing a period of extraordinary institutional turmoil, having to cope with an environment characterized by complexity and dynamism. In this new context, previously excluded groups are now able to easily forge coalitions that turn them into strategic actors, which render the three above-mentioned system’s qualities –effectiveness, legitimacy and representativeness– under continuous pressure and questioning. The serious dislocation between formal and informal institutions, the soaring exclusion levels, the decreasing efficiency levels and the continuous emergence of new social actors are swelling institutional uncertainty and demand, as never before, a superlative adaptability from our democratic institutions. It is really a big challenge.

As we will see in the following section –in which we analyze the internal configuration of the democratic systems– our representative regimes of government are facing this challenge with great difficulty and indecision.

2.2 THE “DARK SIDE” OF THE INFLUENCE

“Democracies are commonly more quiet, and less subject to sedition, than regimes ruled by stirps of nobles”
(Sir Francis Bacon, Essays, 1597)

It is widely known that the term democracy was coined in Athens nearly twenty five hundred years ago, from the Greek words “demos” –which can be translated as “people”– and “kratós” –which means “government” or “authority”–. It refers, therefore, to a regime of government in which the
authority is vested on the people. In the words of Abraham Lincoln, “democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people”.

Despite the term’s age, the democratic ideal it expresses has been so elusive and so hard to attain throughout human history, that we could say it has never been fully realized so far. In Athens itself, women, slaves and foreigners were not considered citizens; and the hundred regimes that have subsequently attributed themselves a democratic character (there are currently only ten countries that do not consider themselves to be "democratic") always pursued a variety of institutional arrangements that favoured their governability but turned them away from the democratic ideal.

Of particular relevance to us are the so-called liberal democracies, which are currently present in most Western countries. Liberal democracies are
characterized by a representative electoral system, the separation of executive, legislative and judicial branches and by proclaiming the rule of law and the protection of several rights and freedoms for its citizens.

Figure 2 shows the major institutional actors in societies governed by liberal democracies, as well as the influence and power relations that exist between them. The arrows linking the actors represent a relationship "accountable to" or "controlled by", and their size and thickness show the intensity of that influence. The figure, which does not refer to any specific country, includes only those relationships that we considered more relevant in order to stimulate the reader’s own reflection.

As illustrated by Figure 2, within liberal democracies the State authorities play a central role as intermediaries and regulators of the behaviour of the other actors. Through the enactment and enforcement of laws, they control that strategic actors’ actions are aligned with the general well-being. The executive, legislative and judicial branches also preserve their independence and control each other through the separation of powers’ institutional arrangements. They are, in turn, accountable to the Citizenry, which is vested with ultimate sovereignty and exercises control over State authorities both directly and through the Political actors. It is worth noting how all the chains of control and social influence are derived ultimately from the public, the actor who enjoys greater autonomy and independence.

The figure alludes, of course, to an ideal situation, which shows how liberal democracies “should operate”; an ideal that, in general, differs considerably from their actual functioning. Typically, there exists a tangle of formal, informal and shadowy institutions operating, which as a whole influence the actors’ incentive systems and cause their interests to disconnect from the public interest. This prevents the democratic ideal to be fulfilled: "people's government" will only operate to the extent that it doesn’t conflict with the most powerful strategic actors’ interests.

This should not surprise us. It should be noted that our democracies have not risen up from the void. All of them are the result of institutional evolution processes, which elites and strategic actors shaped according to their needs. Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) argue that modern democracy emerged out of a strategic face-off between the rich minority and the poor majority. The rich always prefer not to have democracy because the "people's government" entails a high risk of redistributing wealth. However, confronted with the possibility that there is a revolution that would destroy the elite altogether, they are willing to compromise and concede the
transition to governments with some degree of democratic character.

Earl Grey, who in 1832, as prime minister of the United Kingdom, was responsible for the first major reform of the House of Commons, expressed it masterfully: “There is no-one more decided against annual parliaments, universal suffrage and the ballot, than I am. My object is not to favour, but to put an end to such hopes and projects. [...] The principle of my reform is to prevent the necessity of revolution [...] reforming to preserve and not to overthrow” (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). The House of Commons’ composition had hardly changed in the four centuries before that speech, despite its reform had been demanded for almost two hundred years. It took the industrial revolution, which altered the map of strategic actors, and the tangible threat of a popular uprising, in order to force this initial reform, which would start the gradual change process that finally led to the advent of democracy in the United Kingdom.

The elite, however, are unwilling to accept “any” form of democracy; the design of the new democratic system will necessarily include major safeguards against the redistributive powers of the majority. Thus, representative electoral systems are to be selected, which are only partially accountable to the public. The citizens will just be entitled to elect their rulers every four or five years, and the use of plebiscites and referendums will also get limited, to the extent of declaring them illegal for some critical issues. The institutional design will certainly allow that money is spent to influence governments’ actions, through lobbying, bribery or corruption. All these are mechanisms make sure that the more radical political options will never reach office, and avoid that the feared redistribution may ever happen.

Despite its seriousness, these processes of “primeval capture” of the democratic institutions by the elite should not be judged too harshly. For two main reasons: the first is that in most cases the pre-existing institutional environment was so hostile to democracy, that more resolved advances toward democracy were simply not possible. The second reason refers to the fact that, even with all these shortcomings, the changes represented an improvement over the previous situation. We must also recognize that liberal democracies had a positive impact on citizenry’s education levels and freedom of expression rights, and made possible a gradual strengthening of democracy.

Figure 3 illustrates the real conflicting functioning of our democracies. As can be seen, along the channels for legitimate democratic influence that were previously presented, there also flow other conduits of “dark influence”,
which usually even prevail over the legitimate ones. The most significant destabilizing factor is the so-called "fourth estate"—the Media—which, far from fulfilling its public service role by questioning and controlling factual powers, are instead acquired and used by large business conglomerates to defend their interests. The Media thus becomes an essential means for the adulteration of public opinion and for exercising pressure on State authorities and Political actors.

FIGURE 3. THE “DARK SIDE” OF THE INFLUENCE IN DEMOCRACIES

The collusion between Business conglomerates and Political actors is one of the biggest challenges to contemporary democracies, because it is causing that the pursuit of the general well-being that should characterize democracy gets replaced by partisan and self-interested confrontation. There are many other serious problems, such as the influence of Organized crime, the loss of national sovereignty against international organizations or foreign powers,
the subordination of politicians to the hierarchical structures within political parties, the power wielded by the Civil service’s bureaucracy, or the absence of a real separation of powers. These are all challenges that our democracies will have to confront, if they want to gradually approach the democratic ideal that guides them. For each of these problems, plenty of examples from countries around the world could be found, but we cannot address them here because of space constraints. We recommend, however, to any reader interested in learning more about the influence of business corporations, to search for information on the European Roundtable of Industrialists (ERT), a “lobby” that incorporates 46 of the largest European corporations, which has been able to “inspire”, rather than to influence, much of the EU agenda in recent decades. We will instead analyse now a problem which is especially relevant to our book’s subject: how instruments intended for democratic expression can get transformed into tools for the distortion of citizens’ will.

2.2.1 ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC DISTORTION

“If voting changed anything it would be illegal”
(Written on a wall in San Francisco)

Elections are, undoubtedly, the democratic event par excellence. It is through elections that the people exercise its sovereignty, by selecting representatives on which to delegate government tasks. Therefore, it shouldn’t surprise us that electoral systems and electoral procedures are often subject to institutional dispute. Moreover, the analysis of their structure clearly reveals which ones were the elite’s interests at the time the electoral system was established.

We must begin by recognizing that no electoral system is perfect or democratically neutral, because every mechanism that they include has a measurable effect on elections, favouring some parties and harming others (Reynolds et al. 2006). Thereby, electoral systems are always the result of a negotiation process between the strategic political actors, based on their assessment of the effects it will have on their interests.

It is, however, fascinating the extent to which electoral mechanisms can be deformed and moved away from the democratic ideal, because of special interests. For example, in many U.S. states the practice of "gerrymandering" prevails, by which the political parties re-draw electoral districts so as to virtually guarantee the election of their candidates. In this way, in a kind of “upside-down” democracy, politicians are the ones who choose their voters rather than the reverse. In Brazil, a country whose electoral system has led
to a highly fragmented party politics and favoured the extension of political clientelism, it is not surprising for an elected representative to change her party affiliation several times a year.

The Spanish electoral system, for its part, is one of the most distorting among Western democracies. We will discuss it in more detail, because its characteristics and its creation process illustrate very well the phenomena mentioned above.

On the death of General Franco, the dictator who was head of state for nearly forty years, a reform process began which, respecting the dictatorial regime’s legality, sought to establish a democratic regime that would favour the modernization of Spain and its political and economical integration within Europe. The government at the time, which had a center-right political orientation, designed an electoral system that sought to achieve two objectives. First, it should limit party fragmentation so as to produce stable majority governments, which were considered essential for a successful and smooth transition. Second, it had to ensure that the “would be” party of the then-president would achieve a comfortable majority in parliament, with the expected 36% of the votes (Lago and Montero 2005: pp. 6-7). To this end, a pseudo-proportional model, with small provincial constituencies, was selected. This design, on the one hand, significantly favoured the two major national parties at the cost of the rest of national parties; on the other hand, it also favoured conservative over progressive parties. A third aim of this design was to prevent that the Communist Party, legalized just a few months before the election, got a parliamentary influence equivalent to the political force it was believed to have (López Arnal 2007; Sinova 2007).

The ruse was so successful that the electoral system –initially introduced with a temporary character– is still in force more than 30 years later. The two main national parties benefitted so much from it –in average they together received 16% of over-representation in the first three elections– that they ratified it again in 1985, to make it permanent. Since then, they have been attracting an increasing percentage of the total vote, mainly because of the Media concentration that has surged around them, but partly also because of the influence of the electoral system in the behaviour of voters, who tend to vote major parties to maximize the "utility" of their vote.

There is, however, another component of the Spanish electoral system that carries even more severe anti-democratic effects. After four decades of dictatorship in which political parties were outlawed, a system of closed and blocked candidates lists was introduced, to strengthen party structures. That
means that party’s presidium draws up the candidates lists that the citizens will vote in each constituency. Undoubtedly, the closed and blocked lists allow the leadership of the political parties to exercise a strong control and discipline within the party. The problem is that, at the same time, they break the democratic link between electors and elected, and thus transform a democracy in a “partycracy”.

Citizens do no longer elect their representatives; it’s the leadership of the political parties that elect them, by determining the place of candidates on electoral lists, and therefore whether they are elected or not. Instead of having political leaders, which are accountable to their constituents, with whom they keep in continuous communication, what we have are professionals of politics, who thrive within party structures and are therefore used to putting the party’s interests and instructions before everything else. Only by being aware that politicians are not accountable to the citizens, is it possible to understand that Parliament, which should operate as a sanctuary of democratic dialogue for the public well-being, sometimes becomes some kind of Roman circus, in which their Honourable Members behave worse than secondary school louts during the literature lesson (Díez 2007).

The closed and blocked lists generate pernicious dynamics on the side of the citizens too. Since it’s no longer possible to exercise any direct control over the politicians, the incentive to learn about them disappears, to the point that most people do not know beyond the second candidate of their province’s electoral lists. In the end, the citizen has no choice but to establish with political parties a relationship similar to that maintained with football teams: a citizen may cheer them on, boo them, or even identify himself with their colours, but he cannot aspire to determine the way they play; this corresponds to the club’s president, to the team manager or, in any case, to the will and commitment of the players themselves.

In the midst of this process of degradation of democracy, public confidence in political institutions and actors are each day more affected. The latest survey from the Centre for Sociological Research (CIS 2007) shows how the Spaniards believe that politicians do not strive to fulfil their election promises (60.2%), feel that people like them have no influence on the actions of the Government (61.8%) and think that many or nearly all politicians are involved in corruption cases (53.46%). Thus, we return to our starting point: the crisis of identity and legitimacy faced by modern democracies and the growing demand for readjustment of their institutions.

Politicians, in Spain and the rest of the world, are thus forced to confront a
significant dilemma: where can they find the will to change the current rules, being them the ones who most benefit from them? Moreover, these very rules are temporarily shielding politicians against increasing demands for change, and thus enable them to maintain their positions and privileges in the short and medium term. This is, undoubtedly, a difficult to solve a paradox, but as we shall see in the next section, it is not the only nor the most serious paradox that nests on the psyches of politicians.

2.2.2 REPRESENTATIVE POLITICS AND “DOUBLETHINK” SCHIZOPHRENIA

“It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness”

(Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1859)

Schizophrenia is a mental disorder that is characterized by a loss of contact with reality and several alterations of the personality. The literal translation of the term would be "division of the mind"; a division that somehow allows the schizophrenic to believe at the same time one thing and its opposite. George Orwell (1949), in his famous novel “Nineteen ninety four”, created an alternative form of political schizophrenia, which he termed "doublethink" and described as:

> “the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them....To tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them, to forget any fact that has become inconvenient, and then, when it becomes necessary again, to draw it back from oblivion for just so long as it is needed, to deny the existence of objective reality and all the while to take account of the reality which one denies”

Well, it doesn’t seem necessary to live under the inquisitorial eye of the Orwellian "Big Brother" to suffer from this “doublethink” schizophrenia; in fact, for our modern representative democracies’ politicians, such a disorder could almost be considered a "work related syndrome".

Two recent studies on the attitudes of local politicians in the United Kingdom and Belgium (Copus 2007; Verlet et al. 2007) show how, regardless of the ideological orientation of their party, most politicians share an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, they are strong supporters of elections as an excellent mechanism for democratic expression of People’s will: it’s through elections that People bestow on elected representatives the authority and legitimacy required for the exercise of their duties during their mandate. But while recognizing themselves as a product of the electoral system, and therefore an expression of popular will, politicians show a marked aversion to any direct exercise of citizen’s sovereignty that is not mediated by the political representatives and party structures. In particular, they dislike using
referendums for local decision-making, and resent when citizens mobilize themselves to exercise "media pressure" on politicians and to organize their own political "protest parties". The most appropriate and effective option, according to elected officials' opinion, would be that citizens' desire to have political influence is channelled through their elected representatives, or by using the established participation channels. Politicians understand that, in any case, "the mandate they received from their electorate to make actual, final and binding decisions in legitimate institutions" (Verlet et al. 2007: p. 21) must be respected. Didn't they "win" the election precisely to be in power?

Thus, ignoring the many deficiencies of representative electoral systems as a mean to express and advance popular interests rather than elite ends (Fung 2006: p. 27), they justify its reluctance to referendums and other binding forms of citizen participation using some arguments which, in fact, would also invalidate the elections in which they were elected. For example, it is usually alleged that representatives "know much better" and have a greater perspective, fairness and legitimacy than the very own citizenry, as well as contended that the organization of frequent consultations to the public would be technically and organizationally unfeasible. They are, in short, arguments that might be valid when applied to the nineteenth century, but do no longer really apply.

However, it should not surprise us that politicians loathe those democratic arrangements in which they do not appear as central and essential elements of government processes. Their apparent schizophrenia, in fact, does not even relate to our representatives' smaller or bigger kindness. In fact, it is a matter of interest; and "self-interest", in one or another degree, affects all professional trades. Let's be honest: If a university professor had to choose between the university's general interest and her concrete interest as a professor, she will almost always opt for her own interest. Or if a pharmacist must choose between his region's general health interest and his specific interest as a pharmacist, he will almost always opt for his own interest. Thus, if a politician is confronted between the general democratic correctness and his own specific interest as a politician... it is understandable that he elects his own interest. This is simply the basic nature of our societies and of their members, and our institutions are built upon it. Nearly three centuries ago Dr. Mandeville already warned us that the skilful political management precisely consisted of channelling the private interests and vices in a way that could result in an overall public benefit (Mandeville 1729: p. 311).

**STARTING FROM HERE... it's just Google Translate doing its best.**
As we know, all institutions promote the conditions which favour those of their members that ensure the continuity of the institution and its internal structures. For this reason, political parties are rich in politicians that put the status quo before democratic idealism. Thus, just a minority of politicians nowadays regard themselves as "change agents" because they are forced to confront a system of incentives and disincentives that make it difficult to actively promote the empowerment of citizens and the democratization of government. The rest of the political prisoners and remains of a short-term "logic of power" that prevents them from recognizing how, in the long term, the changes would enable them to perform their duties in a more fully satisfactory and sustainable.

According to the institutional mechanisms of evolution that we look at paragraph 2.1.2, the transition to more mature forms of democracy can only flourish when they happen to get new leadership to articulate a compelling agenda for change that occasionally get relieve "esquizofrenitis doblepensante" of our politicians. It is noteworthy how these processes of change already happened in some countries, more than a century ago. In Switzerland, federal republic with a proportional representative system that incorporates a number of mechanisms of direct democracy, virtually all the laws passed at the federal, cantonal and local levels, may be rejected by the public via a referendum, to be convened if 50,000 citizens (ie, approximately 1% of the census) signed for their realization is also possible amendments to laws or even the elevation of popular legislative initiatives.

The vast majority of the laws of Switzerland, of course, not become subject to a referendum, so for practical purposes the work of Swiss politics is very similar to their counterparts in less democratic countries. However, the mere possibility that the public reject laws deemed unsatisfactory, introduces a subtle encouragement that comes to transfigure the legislative process and readjust its own psychology legislators: that the citizen has internalized also choose between power and choice, and occasional refusal to avoid establishing a legislative cycle processes incorporating discussion of the drafts with regional governments, political parties, NGOs and citizens groups, among others. The findings and proposals of these consultative processes will be taken into account by the parliament during the final process of law (Huber 2007).

It is therefore possible to have democratic institutional arrangements that link more closely to the citizens with their representatives, a stimulating and fruitful dialogue between them and resolved, even partially, some of the contradictions that afflict our democratic political systems. However, just a
few countries worldwide have come to explore these pathways shows that this is not an easy transition to make. There are still many nations who, like us, have not been able to answer the question raised earlier: where to find the will to change the current rules, if you should change are precisely those who benefit most from them?

We conclude this section and in which they were presented the essential features of democratic institutions, to concentrate from now on the municipal level. As we shall see, is in this context is more likely that these new leaders emerge, both political and administrative and non-citizens only show us where to draw that elusive desire for change, but ventured to forge new rules for politics.

3. THE GORDIAN KNOT OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY

“Democracy seems only appropriate for a very small country”
(Voltaire, Philosophical Dictionary, 1764)

It is not a coincidence that it was in the polis, the small city-states of ancient Greece, where the political-philosophical notion of democracy crystallized for the first time. Nor is it coincidence that in many languages, including English and Spanish, the word "citizen"—which refers to "a resident of the State as a subject of political rights and speaking, military, the government of the country" (RAE 2001)– derives precisely from the word "city".

Throughout human history cities, and in general the local level have been set up as a democratic privilege. It is precisely at this level where it builds a closer relationship between the rulers and citizens, because the physical proximity that share-ownership by enabling confluency and interests and vital issues facing the two leads to the processes of accountability accounts and ownership are more efficient. Usually, it is also in the municipalities where people are more motivated to seek solutions to problems affecting them, organizing coalitions strong enough to pressure the government or, if necessary, replace them if they do not provide solutions and institutional arrangements that the public demand.

In fact, analyzing the process of "democratic revolution" Swiss in the late nineteenth century, it was noted that local and regional level where democratic innovations emerged gradually would be elevated to the federal level (Kaufmann 2005: p. 130), in a period marked by dissatisfaction and distrust of the Swiss cantons with respect to federal political institutions.
It is important to note how, despite the mechanisms of direct democracy initially sought to challenge and curtail the excesses of the central government, these were the same mechanisms that over time, would reach levels never before seen harmony between the different levels of government and between them and the public.

Political analysts agree that the city will acquire, in this century, even more important than ever were. That importance is derived not only from the massive increase in global urban population — in the past 55 years has quadrupled and now encompasses half of humanity, but is rather related to the socio-political changes, economic and technological countries around the world have experienced in recent decades. At a time when the remaining processes of globalization increasingly scope to the state, much attention is being placed on the local level, subsidiarity and decentralization as ways that promote efficiency, and thus to respond to some social demands and citizens who are increasingly diverse and that states are incapable of meeting.

Cities are, however, have great difficulty in meeting this challenge because, in general, are themselves caught in a difficult situation which is characterized by excessive powers and responsibilities, lack of autonomy and limited resources human and financial resources to address the problems. Since the mid-eighties has been advocating as a possible solution, the transition from a bureaucratic model of municipal government to the "new public management", more flexible and dynamic, and capable of responding to the needs of citizens as companies respond to their customers. After more than twenty years trying, every day is more apparent that such measures are not sufficient to modernizing unravel the complicated "Gordian knot" that blights our towns. On one hand, the bureaucratic inertia of the authorities has been very resistant and reluctant to change, and on the other, it appears that a purely "business" will solve some social challenges that continually grow and diversify.

It becomes increasingly evident and the need to happen even more profound transformation at the local level to reach it to change its policy and institutional framework and replace the traditional vision of "government" a technocratic, centralized and hierarchical - relationship with a new concept of "governance", which recognizes the existence of a multiplicity of relevant stakeholders working at the local level and to allow each of them take their place within dynamic and collaborative networks can jointly address local problems. In this new form of "collaborative governance" transparency, accountability, ownership and participation occupy a central place (Miller and
Webb 2007). It would unleash a process of democratization of municipalities "that could in turn lead to a" municipal democracy ", as we have seen, it might help to resolve the grave crisis of credibility that today afflicts wilted our democracies.

3.1 THE LABIRINTH OF LOCALITY

"It is in the town where the strength of free peoples. Municipal institutions are to liberty what primary schools for science"

(Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1835)

To get a better idea of the morass in which they are currently embroiled our cities we refer back to the Spanish example, which has unique characteristics that make it an interesting case illustration.

In general terms it can be argued that the Spanish municipalities, like the rest of the world's cities, from their institutions face the challenges of limited resources and excessive responsibilities mentioned above. In Spain the situation becomes even more difficult for consistories because of an extraordinary series of events that, taken together, could promote in the coming years will become more convenient, or at least possible, testing and transition towards new models of institutional politics. No desire to be exhaustive, then mentioned the most important factors that would make these changes plausible.

Immigration and social disparity
Spain is experiencing a migration absolutely unprecedented in the world: between 2000 and 2007 the number of immigrants registered almost fivefold, so that now more than 10% of residents come from outside Spain, with strong representation from regions as disparate as Latin America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. This will not only increase in coming years, the percentage of population with limited socio-economic resources to the municipalities should serve, but introduces a unique cultural and social complexity in the hitherto relatively homogeneous Spanish cities, which will certainly pose significant challenges for municipal managers.

Real estate boom and municipal finances
Much of the economic boom that Ireland experienced in the last decade was due to the spectacular real estate boom that covered in the Land Law of 1998, promoted a model of urban development of non-sustainable, which encouraged speculation and widespread corruption (Iglesias et al. 2007a).
According to official figures, house prices rose between 1997 and 2006 by 187% to go off throughout 2007 and will stagnate or fall during 2008. The purpose of this boom will, without doubt, a general slowdown of the Spanish economy and its effect on municipal finances will be, however, much more dramatic.

During the years of the boom of the brick "the vast majority of Spanish municipalities resorted to recalificaciones planning to increase their revenue and improve its financial situation. Unfortunately, the huge extra income from the fiscal indiscipline recalificaciones favored in many cases were improperly used to cover running costs and oversize municipal administration, if not criminal to obtain personal gain by politicians, officials and other intermediaries. And spread throughout the national territory, the practices of corruption, opacity and administrative breaches of planning regulations (Iglesias et al. 2007a), to the extent that between 2000 and 2007 the Spanish media came to withdraw more than a thousand cases of alleged irregularities and suspected cases of urban corruption (Iglesias et al. 2007b).

Without doubt, this has not only led to a deterioration of the democratic system and a major loss of credibility of its institutions, but it poses a very real and persistent challenge to the future municipal managers: to provide services with significantly reduced resources to and a citizenry suspicious cities massively built. In these circumstances, even the most honest and capable manager will have problems in the governance of their city, because the tax increases will be forced to make will be received with great hostility.

It is possible, however, that fueled "urban unrest" serves to strengthen the municipalities within a new professional political and administrative leadership, highlighting their communications skills and his willingness to coordinate with other actors in the search for creative solutions to the problems of the city.

**Deteriorated political climate**
What's more democratic disenchantment caused by the pandemic of corruption town during the last term national political climate has been characterized by a polarization and tension level never before experienced. In these four years there has been no democratic institution, civic consensus or state policy that has been spared the instrumentalisation partisan media and elections.

This confrontation not only excessive and has caused enough discord among the public, but has highlighted a growing proportion of the people
some of the institutional weaknesses which until now had only been themed as the absence of a genuine separation of powers, the widespread political amorality, or the existence of a covert bipartisanship, based on media monitoring mechanisms and flawed elections. After thirty years of democracy, for the first time have achieved resonance questions directed at the head of state is not elected but inherited, and the very process of democratic transition, whose "unquestionable goodness," was established in the collective imagination of some media communication for decades devoted to idealize.

The result is, in any case, a harsher political climate and a growing public skepticism. And while this situation could, at the national level, reinforce the political polarization around the two major parties at the municipal level will have a divisive effect, making it difficult for these parties can get a good representation with local tables that have trained and social support and well-favoring surface to other groups with greater willingness and ability to tune with the public.

**Institutional hostility toward public participation**

Although the Spanish Constitution proclaims that "citizens have the right to participate in public affairs, directly or through representatives," the reality is that your article shows openly hostile to the mechanisms of direct democracy. It is, in fact, a major setback for the previous Constitution, which allowed for revocation referendum push laws passed by Congress. At present, citizens have only one tool, the People's Legislative Initiative (PLI), which allows them to submit to Congress a proposed law that comes endorsed by at least half a million signatures. However, there is an extensive list of legislative items excluded from the grassroots initiatives, covering almost all important issues: rights, civil liberties, penal code, education, constitutional reform, autonomy statutes, treaties and international affairs, taxation, economic planning prerogative of mercy ... Some of the items prohibited. There is also no guarantee that the proposal be handled by Congress, which can spontaneously refuse admission or to misrepresent their content in a way that ultimately legislating something different or even opposed to the proposal by the citizens. Thus, the ILP is completely ineffective, as evidenced by the fact that none of the 45 initiatives in nearly 30 years has finally been adopted, with the possible exception of an initiative whose content was considered subsumed within another bill proposed by the political groups.

As for the plebiscite to citizenship, are configured more as a mechanism for
the government to legitimize its decisions as a tool for the exercise of popular sovereignty: they are called by the President of the Government at your convenience and are purely Advisory, so the result does not need to be respected. The experience of the two referendums to be held in 1986 and 2005, on the permanence of Spain into NATO and the European Constitution also shows how the state machinery is used, almost without restrictions, to encourage the result desired by the government, disdain any democratic principle of neutrality (Demopunk Net 2005; Martinez Sanchez 2001).

Similarly, the Constitution provides that any plebiscite to be carried out at regional or municipal level require the prior approval of the Government of the Nation, by agreement in the Council of Ministers (Macías Ibáñez 2005). Take the example of a group of neighbors who would like to promote a public consultation to decide whether to build a fountain in the square of its people. These neighbors should be a "special advocate", develop a legislative proposal that provides for the conduct of the plebiscite and register at the City Council, which supports fully evaluate whether or not the procedure, based on the report by the Commission for Citizen Participation. May well start collecting the signatures of 15% of citizens in sheets duly authorized by the council. The signatures will be checked one by one to the competent authority, the municipal government can then move on to consider whether to accept or reject the proposal, which must also be discussed by Parliament once studied the reports of the Secretary and the Comptroller. If it decides to approve the completion of the consultation, then when applying for authorization, the government first and then the regional government, so they can finally begin preparations for the consultation itself: its call, the campaign, voting at polling stations, counting of votes, and so on. Since, in all likelihood, the referendum would be advisory only, at the end would be the municipal government to decide whether or not abide by its outcome. In total, will have elapsed months if not years, since the beginning of the process. So, anyone surprised that the few consultations convened at the local and regional levels have been made, as far as we know, outside legal channels and, therefore, have been ignored or even banned by the authorities (Demopunk Net 2002).

The model presents Spanish citizen participation, especially to "national", a driver and restrictive for practical purposes does not differ much from that used occasionally by type of dictatorial regimes. The vast majority of Spaniards do not know that there are other ways of exercising their citizenship other than through the election, just as they are unaware of the
remaining imbalances in the Spanish democratic scaffold. Forty years of dictatorship and then a remarkable job endoculturación for the status quo since the education system and mass media have spread among the people the impression that democracy is basically every four years to choose between lists proposed by political parties.

The situation is, however, likely to change in coming years. The patent anachronism of this legislation will do more and more visible to a public increasingly critical and increasingly used to be consulted and give their opinion. Moreover, an outdated and restrictive legislation gives greater visibility to critical movements, campaigns and actions which could serve to desanudar the hitherto suppressed demand for citizen participation. To give an example that contrasts with which we previously: free software systems being developed will soon allow any neighbor or social organization to organize, at no cost and with reasonable procedural safeguards, a pseudo-virtual referendum for city, where citizens who wish to participate may be using at home, your digital ID, obtaining a result within a period of days or weeks. Of course, this consultation, were not authorized by the President's Office, would not have any legal validity, but if, for example, more than half the population of a municipality approved the proposal, moral and democratic legitimacy -- as well as its media-so strong that it would be very costly for the mayor ignored. Sooner or later, local and regional authorities will realize that such exercises of expression of the will of the people are difficult to suppress, both from a technical point of view as democratic and try to use its significant regulatory power (Ibáñez Macías 2007) to establish a legal framework to introduce participatory mechanisms on which they can exert greater influence and be accepted by the public.

**Territorial and identitary tensions**

One of the greatest wealth of Spain are its diversity of climates and terrain, as well as the many cultures and peoples who, throughout history, converged and developed within its small geographical size. In fact, some of their existing linguistic communities spread their roots to pre-Roman times, so to speak of more than twenty-five centuries of coexistence between fortunate and unfortunate sisters cultures grown in the Iberian Peninsula.

In 1936, a few months after starting the Spanish Civil War, General Franco explained to the foreign press would be his future territorial policy: "The character of each region shall be respected, but without prejudice to national unity, which we absolutely , with a single language, Castilian, and a single personality, Spanish (Lainz 2004). It goes without saying that the nearly 40
years of dictatorship that followed these statements constitute one of the most difficult periods of cohabitation between the Iberian regions. In fact, the systematic repression against nationalism peripherals and banning their language and cultural manifestations exacerbate them what Castells (1999) calls for resistance identities: those that conform to the feeling that "someone out there" is not let be what they are, and who claim their right to be the most diverse means, including armed struggle and terrorism.

In an attempt to amend the excesses Franco, the Spanish territorial model was radically transformed in the process of transition to democracy: Spain became one of the most decentralized in Europe, with a pseudo-federal system structured around the called "autonomous communities" that have high levels of self-government. However, remember that the architects of the "sabotage" came from the same regime that tried to transform. The same way that, almost six years after the death of the dictator was still considering the salary of a married woman, whose legal capacity was assimilated during the dictatorship to a child or a mad-as a property to be managed by her husband (Ortiz Heras 2006), the patriarchal conception of the Franco impregnaría also the new model of autonomy, and in key limiting thus making it a source of continuing tensions today. Using the metaphor of patriarchal marriage, it could be argued that the central government was reserved in his relationship with a certain priority areas marital, the one that lets you point out: "you are what you are ... as far as I tell you, okay? ". Interpreted in these terms, Article 8 of the Constitution, which gives the Armed Forces mission to defend the "territorial integrity" of Spain pointed out: "... and as I speak of divorce, the birth will face" (Gordillo 2006, Ortiz 2007).

The process of revising the Statute of Autonomy, the basic rules of the autonomous regions to set the margins of self, which was initiated in 2005 and has yet to be completed, not only has failed to defuse tensions between regions and between various levels of government, but will probably contribute to aggravating them in the coming years. The public, perhaps concerned about everyday issues, has shown little interest in the dispute on jurisdiction. The national and regional political and awaken in people, it seems, similar levels of detachment. In scenarios like this, governments of the regions with nationalist agendas that require legitimacy and differentiated with respect to the central government, tend to promote financial and legislative mechanisms for participation at the regional and municipal levels, thereby claiming a closer to the interests of citizens. This is a process that, for example, is taking place in Scotland, and in a way that also happens in
Spain: communities with more industrial-agendas Catalonia and the Basque country, are also those that have more prominent in these areas (Borge et al. 2008: pp. 14-18; Catalan 2006).

Widespread lack of participatory culture in the municipalities

Spanish democracy is still very young. Much of its population grew, in fact, under a regime of dictatorship and socio-economic conditions very different from today. Continuity with the spirit that developed prevented the democratic transition, in turn, to apply a genuine restoration of democratic pedagogy in educating new generations. It is not therefore surprising that the educational and cultural background of the Spanish, as well as the institutions that operate at the local level, including just and participatory democratic powers.

On one hand, local governments and political parties themselves are compartmentalized environments that still prevail in a hierarchical organizational values, formal and technocratic. That is why the vast majority of mayors, municipal elected officials and technical staff will be so difficult to promote citizen participation, because they lack the necessary training, experience and confidence in the culture of dialogue. Quite the opposite is true: the uncertainty and distrust resulting from their lack of familiarity with the participation exacerbates their resistance to change and makes them feel like a risky innovation, which complicates the decision-making and forces them to abandon their plots of power.

The public, meanwhile, presents a suspicious political culture and, usually, is far from the administration and politicians. There is little trust and complicity between rulers and ruled that it is essential for the work. For the small percentage of citizens who would be willing to engage and move beyond the elections, municipal participatory activities that have a highly-face are almost always incompatible with the rest of their work, family and personal. Furthermore, so that a citizen has to notice that the topic is relevant and that their efforts may actually be reflected in government decisions, something that happens just yet.

It is also important to note the lack of participatory culture of civic associations, around which has been traditionally the city. In particular, the movement is characterized by its neighbors inbreeding, limited representation and internal democracy and a low capacity for renewal, with boards in some cases barely changed in 25 years (Martín Prieto-2004). In some municipalities, neighborhood associations are a real counterpoint to
the municipality and are co-opted by partisan interests. In fact, the neighborhood associations usually wary of methodologies seeking direct participation of citizens, as they prefer to negotiate certain issues are only with them.

As for the local media and academic institutions, which should have provided the space and references from which municipalities develop a healthy democratic criticism and experimentation, the fact is that they have rarely done, usually before to monitor the municipal powers that have been placed at its service and contributed to mitigating the impact of citizen participation processors.

It can be concluded that if public participation can be extended at the municipal level, we need to make processes of "democratic learning" in all these sectors (Álvarez Rodríguez 2002). However, there are signs that such processes are already initiatives among governmental actors, evolving styles of government toward more "relational" (Brugué 2002) and the associations and their own citizens, who through collective newly articulated demands of an increasingly assertive (Morales 2005). In the coming years it is therefore expected to occur at the municipal level Spanish training of increasing technical and political renewal of a progressive and neighborhood associations, as well as the maturity and widespread use of participatory tools and procedures.

...the maze of silk

We analyzed the factors that make the Spanish case in a particularly illustrative example of the challenges and problems that cities around the world are forced to confront. Problems that are usually entangle with each other to weave a knot or a seemingly insoluble maze. What we nevertheless argument is that these are precisely the difficulties that could foster greater experimentation and transition to new models of political institutions which in turn will enable our communities not only emerged from the maze, but do processed (Goss 2001).

In a way, these problems are like strands of silk that turned into cocoon, caught the worm during its transformation process into a butterfly. It can be argued that the worm is prepared by nature to secrete acid, which finally opened its output, but also could be argued that if there is a political system prepared to reform itself, incremental improvements in its institutional structure, that is the democratic system. If the Franco dictatorship was able to engender within it a fledgling democracy, it should either be able to further improve and deepen its democratic essence.
There is no doubt that most politicians and municipal technicians initial misgivings of the changes in a manner similar to the worm-feet as they are accustomed to carry back and forth, creating die in the chrysalis. But as they are transformed and finally assume its role changed to become part of a wing, also read his new and vital political role in a democracy of collaborative nature, which will fill the role of leaders and coordinators the network of urban actors working for local governance (i Centelles Portella 2007).

3.2 LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

“No army can stop an idea whose time has come”

(Victor Hugo, Story of a crime, 1852)

On several occasions we have mentioned already, in a somewhat vague, the notion of "governance", proposing as a model that would prevail in the municipalities and guide the strategies and actions of politicians and their administrators. After our journey through the maze of local "it is time that we define more precisely and thus conclude this introductory chapter explaining the relationship between local governance and the processes of political and democratic development.

One of the most common definitions for governance is used by the United Nations (UN), which considers governance as:

"The system of values, policies and institutions by which a society manages its economic, political and social affairs through interactions within and among the state, civil society and private sector. It is the way a society organizes itself to make and implement decisions –achieving mutual understanding, agreement and action. It comprises the mechanisms and processes for citizens and groups to articulate their interests, mediate their differences and exercise their legal rights and obligations. It is the rules, institutions and practices that set limits and provide incentives for individuals, organizations and firms. Governance, including its social, political and economic dimensions, operates at every level of human enterprise, be it the household, village, municipality, nation, region or globe." (UNDP 2004)

For most readers will be drawn attention to the similarity between this definition and that in the second paragraph referred to as "institutional framework". The truth is that both concepts are referred to almost the same: while academics rely on institutional theory to study the social systems with a highly analytical, consultants and government agencies use the concept of international governance explain, with a more practical approach and policy, influencing how the institutions and processes of government based on how it could improve the formulation and implementation of public policies. The mood "policy" is the term that leads to almost never speak of governance
itself, but used variations adjetivadas as "democratic governance", "good governance" or "relational governance" - depending on whatever the mode of governance that the agency tries to promote. Usually, all these variants share an essential link: explicit recognition to a particular social field, in a variety of stakeholders, public, private and voluntary, which makes it necessary to relate to them in a network-to-negotiate and engage in the formulation and implementation of certain policies (Brugué 2002).

To make this possible, the various levels of government should play a coordinating role in such networks to be able to lead and influence a decision-making processes, according to the White Paper on European governance, would be characterized by transparency, consistency, efficiency, openness to participation, accountability and responsibility (European Commission 2001). Recently it has been pointed out the need to give special consideration to minorities and vulnerable segments of society (UNGC 2007).

The biggest problem of these approaches lies in its patent voluntarism: describes the ideals that form the puzzle of governance "but only clarify the linkages and priorities between them or how to implement them. While in the process of globalizing the government is losing its primacy in the management of public affairs and therefore are forced to take a role as "one more" multi-acting network of governance, No less true is that, as we saw when considering the "grim institutions" - one of the main functions of these networks is precisely the "management of exclusion", which provide that those in power can keep them. That is why even in cases where there is a political leadership willing to open up the decision-making is very difficult to promote a truly inclusive governance, as they overcome the resistance of those who make up such spaces. As we saw in 2.1. The process of institutional development are difficult and require not only the emergence of new leadership but also the existence of an enabling environment for change. It is the law of life that participation, influence and power rarely are "gifts" for those who have, in general, requires the assistance of the excluded themselves that consistently claiming their own, to convince the elite that is better to have them as the "dispersal of power" that will lead to their inclusion at the same time creating the conditions and new sources of power from which to tackle and solve the challenges together.

This "interactive process of learning and public decision making, based on the creation of power and its dispersal through a gradual integration into the decision-making in areas previously excluded groups," is what Julie Fisher (1998: pp. 21 172) termed as "political." As you can see, we propose that the
transition to new models of governance would be a more collaborative in this laborious process of political development that throughout history, from monarchists and despotic regimes of old, came to engender our current liberal democracies. The same way that today we could not qualify for democratic systems in the early nineteenth century were regarded as such and which however excluded the public based on their race, sex, wealth and education, could arrive day that the current representative systems are considered only as proto-democracies or emerging democracies, still strongly imbued as we saw in 2.2.- traits demagogic plutocráticos and partitocráticos. The truth is that our democracy is not yet fully expressed genuine interest in this "continuing improvement" that characterizes the democratic ideal, and that would take them to build spaces that allow citizens, who are as legitimate custodians of sovereignty, the exercise also maximum degree, deciding on matters of their own choosing.

That is why it is not enough that organizations such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe preach the excellence of governance for this new paradigm becomes a reality that complements and depriving the model of government. In our view, the puzzle of governance must necessarily start from the bottom solved: it is necessary to promote the empowerment of those who most benefit reform, and do so in precisely those areas and contexts in which they can more easily demanding change, once equipped with the tools to do so. We therefore refer to the "Local Governance", which is where we will focus on the remaining book.

And in local governance, we understand that the emphasis must be placed on achieving a "deliberative and inclusive participation of all stakeholders, whether arising from the public sector, private, voluntary or that of citizenship. If you are even able to activate the other components of governance such as transparency and accountability, will flow from it. It is precisely at the local level where it is easier to open spaces for deliberative and inclusive participation, either by the political leadership aware or coalitions of citizens organized around their problems. The study compared the experiences of direct democracy suggests that the use of these tools are secure and have a democratizing effect on representative institutional framework in which they reside, should be entroncadas in local and regional level (Auer 2007; Zovatto 2007). Similarly, it is hoped that successful models of participatory governance in place at the local level tend to replicate in other areas of local and regional level to rise and state.

Regarding the tools used to trigger these processes and structure of governance, the key will not be other than the Internet. After this network
that has revolutionized global cyber such diverse fields like finance, communications, business, research, interpersonal relationships and pornography ... No doubt at this stage and that the application of Information Technologies and Communication (ICT) to the democratic processes of decision making and extension and improvement of public participation will play a key role in the evolution of our democratic systems and the introduction and spread of collaborative models of governance.

Adentrémonos pues definitivamente en ese fascinante –y todavía apenas explorado– espacio en que confluyen la gobernanza local, la participación ciudadana y las TICs. Para ello, en el próximo capítulo analizaremos en detalle en qué consiste la participación ciudadana en el ámbito local, cuáles son sus herramientas y sus problemáticas, así como la forma en que las TICs en general e Internet en particular podrán potenciarla, convirtiendo así el aldabón de la participación en un ariete que sea capaz de catalizar los procesos de desarrollo político y democrático de nuestras sociedades, y de regenerar así nuestras “democracias marchitas”.

Let’s definitively penetrate in this fascinating, yet little-explored area in which local governance, citizen participation and ICTs confluence. To do this in the next chapter will analyze in detail what the public participation at the local level, what are their tools and their concerns and how ICTs in general and the Internet in particular can be improved, thus making the aldabón of participating in a striker who is able to catalyze the process of political and democratic development of our societies, and thereby restore our democracies wilted.
References

4. BIBLIOGRAPHY

NOTE: References marked with (*) are available online at the time of publication of the book. Search the title in quotation marks at google or similar search engine, and you will get the source document.


CIS (2007) *Encuesta de opinión: Ciudadanía y estado II (ISSP)*, Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas. (*)


COMITÉ AD HOC SOBRE DEMOCRACIA ELECTRÓNICA (CAHDE) (2007) *Shortfalls in democratic Practice*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe. (*)


DEMOPUNK NET (2002) "La democracia directa en España". (*)


GORDILLO, J.L. (2006) "Sobre el ignominioso artículo 8", Mientras tanto, nº 33. (*)


LAGO, I. y MONTERO, J.R. (2005) "Todavía no sé quiénes, pero ganaremos": Manipulación política del sistema electoral", Zona Abierta, nº 110/111. (*)


MANDEVILLE, B. (1729) The Fable of the Bees or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits. With an essay on Charity and Charity Schools, and a Search into the Nature of Society, London: J. Tonson. (*)

MARTÍNEZ SÁNCHEZ, J.A. (2001) "El referéndum sobre la permanencia de España en la OTAN". (*)

MILLER, P. y WEBB, M. (2007) "Flesh, steel and Wikipedia. How government can make the most of online collaborative tools", en The Collaborative State. How working together can transform public services, S. Parker y N. Gallagher (Eds), London: Demos. (*)


PORRAS, J.I. (2005) "Internet y las nuevas oportunidades para la deliberación pública en los espacios locales", Nueva Sociedad, nº 195. (*)


RAE (2001) *Diccionario de la lengua española (22ª edición)*, Madrid: Real Academia de la Lengua Española. (*)


RODRÍGUEZ ÁLVAREZ, J.M. (2002) *La participación de los ciudadanos en la vida pública local. Recomendación del Comité de Ministros del Consejo de Europa e informe explicativo*, Barcelona: Fundació Carles Pi i Sunyer d'Estudis Autonòmics i Locals. (*)


SINOVA, J. (2007) «Por miedo a que el PCE arrasara, UCD ayudó con dinero al PSOE de Felipe». *Entrevista a Leopoldo Calvo-Sotelo*, Madrid: El Mundo, 2007.06.15. (*)

