

## Empowering cities and citizens within emerging models of multilevel governance

*Ciudades y ciudadanía empoderada en un contexto  
emergente de gobernanza multinivel*

*Cidades e cidadania fortalecidas em um contexto  
emergente de governança multinível*

Ricard Gomà<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

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*The article will be dealing with the empowerment of local institutions within a complex context of multilevel governance. The strengthening of cities will lead us to consider a new transformative municipalism. The transition from classic government to relational forms of governance paves the way to consider both emerging multilevel networks and models of citizen involvement at local level. The case of Barcelona today will be shown as an example of both trends: initiatives of community engagement in urban policymaking, and local-global action at European and international level.*

**Keywords:** Networks. Governance. Empowerment. Multilevel.

### Resumen

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*El artículo aborda el proceso de empoderamiento de las instituciones locales en un contexto complejo de gobernanza multinivel. El fortalecimiento de las ciudades nos conduce a considerar el nuevo municipalismo transformador. La transición del gobierno clásico a formas relacionales de articular la gobernanza nos permite analizar tanto las redes multinivel, como los modelos de participación ciudadana en el ámbito local. El caso de Barcelona es tomado como ejemplo: iniciativas de implicación comunitaria en la producción de políticas urbanas y acción local-global a escala europea e internacional.*

**Palabras clave:** Redes. Gobernanza. Empoderamiento. Multinivel.

<sup>1</sup> Associate professor of political science at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. E-mail: [ricard.goma@uab.cat](mailto:ricard.goma@uab.cat). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6312-1948>

## Resumo

GOMÀ, Ricard. Cidades e cidadania fortalecidas em um contexto emergente de governança multinível. *Revista Ciência & Trópico*, v. 43, edição especial, p. 13-22, 2019. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.33148/CeTrópico\\_v.43n.esp\(2019\)p.1-8](https://doi.org/10.33148/CeTrópico_v.43n.esp(2019)p.1-8)

O artigo aborda o processo de empoderamento de instituições locais em um complexo contexto de governança multinível. O fortalecimento das cidades nos leva a considerar o novo municipalismo transformador. A determinação do governo clássico às formas relacionais de articulação da governança permite analisar tanto as redes multiníveis quanto os modelos de participação do cidadão no nível local. O caso de Barcelona é tomado como exemplo: iniciativas de envolvimento da comunidade na produção de políticas urbanas e de ação local-global em escala europeia e internacional.

**Palavras-chave:** Redes. Governança. Capacitação. Multinível.

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## 1. Strategic local policy regimes

Within the golden age of the Keynesian Welfare State (KWS) (1945-1975), two main models of local government were shaped in western Europe. In the Atlantic fringe (from Sweden to Ireland) cities became the executive arms of the major KWS policies, but without any relevant political autonomy. In the central and southern countries, local authorities were provided with community-building and decisionmaking powers, but they remained – with very limited budgets – at the margin of the main urban and social policy areas (VEGA, 2009).

Over the recent years, these traditional patterns have shifted along two lines. As a common trend, local governments strengthened in both political autonomy and public expenditure levels. All of them have played *expanded* and *more strategic* roles in the various paths of urban and KWS restructuring. But this trend has taken place within a simultaneous process of diversification: *different local policy regimes* can be identified today. Using the words of welfare typology (PIERSON; CASTLES, 2007), **table 1** shows their principal features on underlying values, policy agendas and management models.

**Table 1:** Local regimes in Europe: values, agendas and governance

	Values	Urban agenda	Urban governance
Scandinavian	Equality / sustainability	Socioecological transition	Networks / innovation
Continental	Protection / anti risk	Urban regeneration	Public private partnerships
Anglo-saxon	Inclusive growth	Creative and smart city	New public management
Mediterranean	Citizenship building	Commons/ open democracy	Community-based

**Source:** Elaborated by the author.

## 2. “European Union (EU)” Multilevel governance networks

Multilevel tension within the process of building policy powers has been a constituent element of European politics. On the one hand the *logic of diversity*, embedded in different institutional levels and agendas, made the creation of a single EU policymaking state very difficult. On the other hand the *logic of European integration*, developed on the basis of the traditional model of multi-sectoral policy harmonization, made difficult as well the emergence of new, local policy powers (LE GALÈS, 2004).

However, over the last decades, an innovative view of the subsidiarity principle has opened the way to a scenario of *local empowerment* within a *multilevel governance model*, where strategic europeanization of policies not only exclude but even foster the role of cities and municipal networks at every policy field, from urban to social inclusion strategies, from environmental to local economic development (FANTOVA, 2014; FELBER, 2012).

**Table 2:** Policymaking systems depending on level and model of EU Integration

		Model of Integration	
		Comprehensive	Strategic
Level of Integration	High Europeanization	<i>Single policymaking state</i>	<i>Multilevel governance</i>
	Low Europeanization	<i>Transfer of policy paradigms</i>	<i>Convergence of policy aims</i>

Source: Elaborated by the author

In other words, the traditional models of functional or dual federalism, where local government was pushed to implementation roles or to a marginal agenda are now being replaced by a *relational policymaking federalism*. A multilevel governance based on policy networks with interdependencies and shared powers, and with expanded and strategic urban agendas. A model which, crucially, does not accept stable and rigid legal frames of powers allocation, but needs to be managed on the grounds of *deliberation, learning and open political negotiation*. (BLANCO, GOMÀ, 2002).

**Table 3:** From intergovernmental relations to multilevel governance networks

	Intergovernmental Relations (Classic patterns)		<i>Multilevel governance networks</i>
	Functional Decentralized Model	Dual state model	<i>Relational policymaking federalism</i>
Power relations	Hierarchies	Legal Autonomy	<i>Interdependencies</i>
Responsibilities allocation	Specialization	Segmentation	<i>Shared</i>
Local Agendas	Cross-sectoral	Narrow/Marginal	<i>Expanded</i>
Local Roles	Implementation	Decision-making	<i>Strategic</i>

**Source:** Elaborated by the author

### 3. Better and fairer cities through people policymaking networks

It is assumed so far that different local regimes have emerged recently in Europe, with expanded agendas and playing strategic roles. Moreover, cities are today working within a relational and open policymaking federalism which brings multilevel networks at the heart of a changing European governance (HANTRAIS, 2007). In this context, the city of Barcelona shows some features that can be useful to illustrate these assumptions.

Barcelona may be considered a case of latin-mediterranean city and its local policy regime. It is, on the one side, a densely populated place, where the urban functional, cultural and social class mix is quite well preserved across the neighbourhoods. Besides this, there is a high density of social ties and networks which give communities a sense of identity, and strong patterns of urban space commoning. It is not, of course, the entire reality. Barcelona is also a city which receives every year 20 million of tourists, and is perceived by global financial agents as a platform of high profit for property investment. Both things have great impacts: they tend to erode the urban mix, make housing very expensive, and generate gentrification processes. On that basis, how does local government manage to *reinforce an urban regime based on citizenship-building values*, and to face the risks which may undermine them?

The new urban agenda establishes the right to the city at the heart of the local regime, which is built through a set of common good policies on the housing, environmental, social and economic dimensions. But it is crucial that those policies are to be delivered by a governance system of *open policy networks* which enable *the involvement of residents, communities and their organizations*. The challenge is then making policies work not only for citizens, but by citizens (LAVAL, DARDOT, 2015). This option might be seen as a complex and even inefficient way to reach policy outputs. But there are at least three types of arguments which support the approach. Firstly, an argument of *values*: people participation in policy networks as a means to deepen democracy; secondly an argument of *power*: to make effective the right to the city, a more democratic power structure, and a

new balance of power relations that transfers influence from corporate actors to the people are needed; and third, an argument of *knowledge and complexity*, as we are living in cities of increasing social diversity and shared knowledge, and therefore nobody is able to grasp enough experience or expertise to ensure good policy outputs. Good governance becomes, instead, a set of social learning processes. In summary, *citizen involvement* in the urban governance arena is a way to deliver *more sensible and fairer policies*.

**Table 4:** Models of urban policymaking according to levels of social and knowledge diversity

		Social diversity	
		Limited	Complex
Knowledge Sharing	Low	Urban policymaking as rational top-down structures	Urban policymaking as collective negotiation
	High	Urban policymaking as operative experimentation	<i>Urban policymaking as Social learning processes</i>

**Source:** Elaborated by the author

What are the real ways to put in practice citizen involvement in urban policymaking? Based on Barcelona experience, 6 strategies can be listed as governance proposals to empower residents, communities and social organizations.

### **3.1. Empowering by networks of policy coproduction**

#### *3.1.1. Coproduction of urban policies*

Coproduction is policymaking in common. It is a step beyond a traditional stakeholder approach to policy networks, and beyond conventional citizen participation (PASCUAL, 2010). The starting point is that the public is wider than the institutional. It becomes a shared space where partnerships between local state, citizens and community agents may provide new grounds for policymaking. Coproduction may involve a process of participatory budgeting, whereby people codecide priorities and investments; common policy planning on key broad areas (education, social inclusion, mobility or ecological transition); and action networks to implement policies and programmes.

#### *3.1.2. Community Development Plans (CDP)*

It is the area-based dimension of policy coproduction. Barcelona is divided into 73 neighbourhoods. The CDP are the development strategy of each, on the grounds of a communitarian evaluation of needs and potentials, which gives way to a popular planning process on a comprehensive policy approach. So the CDP are intended to improve the community life with better health, education, care, housing, public space, etc. But they are intended to do so by enabling the involvement of the people, and by interconnecting policies and actors. Local public services work together with grassroots organisations, and professionals of different policy areas start to bring together resources, actions and aims.

### **3.2. *empowering by networks of citizen management***

#### **3.2.1. *Remunicipalization and democratic management***

Over the past decades, a strong movement led to urban commodification, that is, the transfer of basic goods to the market. This trend is now on the road to be reversed. But not to go back to a system of bureaucratic provision. Instead, the remunicipalization of services and common goods – from children and home care to energy and water supply – open the way to new forms of cooperative and decentralized public management, open to people engagement and under social and democratic control.

#### **3.2.2. *Citizen management of centers and urban spaces***

Another relevant feature in local policymaking was externalizing the private management of public services on a competitive contract basis. This trend even reached the network of neighbourhood-based cultural and civic centers, owned by the Council. Recently, the alternative explored to reverse this has consisted of a model of citizen management. It implies the community managing the centers by means of a network of social organizations. They propose a project which is publicly evaluated and it becomes an agreement signed by both sides: local authority and the community network. This model has also been extended to public spaces with non-executed planning provisions (urban empties). The overall result is now a pluralist network of public-community partnerships running urban, social and cultural projects both on centers and streets: networks for the involvement of citizens in the building of common spaces.

### **3.3. *Other forms of empowerment: direct democracy and social innovation***

#### **3.3.1. *Local direct democracy tools***

Citizen involvement in local decisionmaking is about networks and open deliberation, but it is also about the devolution of direct capacity to local residents to make a concrete decision on a city issue through a consultation or a referendum. Direct democracy tools should embrace processes of appropriate information and spaces of public debate. They should guarantee as well that the result of the referendum will be considered a binding decision, with the obligation to be implemented.

#### **3.3.2. *Support to social innovation practices***

The recent crisis and its impacts on the most vulnerable groups and urban areas, as well as the austerity policies with social cuts, have provoked the development of social innovation practices. As defined by the European Union, they are initiatives focused on building new types of collective answers to emerging human needs, beyond the institutional sphere, and oriented to empower people and neighbourhoods. They may range from community food provision to children shared caring and networks of knowledge or time exchange. The challenge for local authorities is to set up resources and schemes of recognition and support without eroding the autonomy of the social innovation practices.

Coproduction, Community Development Plans (CDP), remunicipalization, citizen management, direct democracy and social innovation can be considered as a set of keystones to build the new urban regime in terms of common good and people involvement. These strategies, which are now being implemented in Barcelona, are coherent with the two initial assumptions: *the local level is playing a set of reinforced strategic roles*, and it is doing so reversing both bureaucratic and market models, by *building urban governance networks as a pluralistic arena of citizen involvement in the common good city*.

#### 4. Stronger and fairer cities through international networks

In the previous paragraphs, the ideas of a reinforced local government level shaping an urban policy regime through networks of citizen involvement have been illustrated taking into account the case of Barcelona. But that is not the whole story. There is another part: the building of international networks. This can be analyzed briefly along two dimensions. On the one side, a dimension of scale: European and global. On the other, a political dimension: *multilevel networks to involve local authorities on governance with other institutions*, and *horizontal networks to strengthen the transformative role of cities*. In the crossing of both settings, different experiences emerge.

**Table 5:** Different models and scales of International networks of cities

	Networks to reinforce cities in multilevel governance	Networks to reinforce cities as a level for change
European	Eurocities	Issue network cities (Refugges welcome, ecological transition...)
Global	UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments)	Habitat III Alternatives

**Source:** Elaborated by the author

##### 4.1. Networks of cities within multilevel governance

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), headquartered in Barcelona, is the global network of cities aimed at *being the united voice and world advocate of democratic local self-government, promoting its values, objectives and interests within the wider international community*. UCLG's work programme focuses on: a) Increasing the role and influence of local government and its representative organisations in global governance; and b) Becoming the main source of support for democratic, effective, innovative local government close to the citizen. Eurocities was founded in 1986 by the mayors of six large cities: Barcelona, Birmingham, Frankfurt, Lyon, Rotterdam and Milan. Today, Eurocities brings together the local governments of over 130 European cities. Through six thematic forums and a wide range of

working groups and projects, the network attempts to influence the EU institutions to respond to common issues that affect the day-to-day lives of urban Europe, as well as it offers members a platform for sharing knowledge and exchanging ideas. As the Eurocities Manifesto declares:

our objective is to reinforce the important role that local governments should play in a multilevel governance structure. We aim to shape the opinions of Brussels stakeholders and ultimately shift the focus of EU legislation in a way which allows city governments to tackle strategic challenges at local level (Eurocities Manifesto)

#### 4.2. *Networks of cities for change*

Habitat is the United Nations summit on cities and urban sustainable development which is held every 20 years. The Habitat III meeting took place in Quito, in October 2016. More than half of the world population is now living in urban areas. In this sense, Habitat III opened up the Urban Age, and a *New Urban Agenda* was discussed and approved. However, the main institutional actors were the nation-states with their presidents and ministers. Cities and mayors played a quite marginal role. This contradiction was a key factor to fuel the urban alternative forums, where cities and other urban and community agents met to discuss and claim for the *right to the city* and for a system of urban real democracy at a global scale. *Habitat III Alternative*<sup>2</sup> and *Resist Habitat III*<sup>3</sup> final statements may be thus considered as the seed of horizontal networks of cities building a transformative municipalism.

However, it is at European level, where the network of cities for change has gained visibility and has impacted upon key policy issues. Last year, the political force now in power in Barcelona, Barcelona in Common, launched a framework statement advocating for a strong relationship between new municipalism and the reconstruction of Europe from below:

We still believe that our response should be based on our local communities, on proximity, on municipalism. The city is the space in which democracy was born, and it will be where we can win it back. But *we must not think about the city in isolation*; we have to link up with other European cities that are in a process of democratic transformation. That is why we have to be ready to connect different situations, know-how and processes to create a *network of cities for real democracy, alternative economies, human rights and the commons*. If we are able to imagine a different Europe, we will have the power to transform it.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.flacso.edu.ec/flax15/\\_upload/habitatIII/Manifesto\\_Quito](https://www.flacso.edu.ec/flax15/_upload/habitatIII/Manifesto_Quito)

<sup>3</sup> <https://resistenciapopularhabitat3.org/2016/10/25/declaracion-por-la-defensa-de-nuestros-territorios/>



Different networks of cities around key policy issues have been created in Europe. Being some of the most relevant the network of *Refugees Welcome Cities*, oriented to put together local-level strategies to host refugees from countries with armed conflicts, in the light of the failure of EU-level responses; or the *Transition Towns* network, where cities share strategies to urban sustainable development and socioecological change. Finally, it is important to mention, at national level, the network of *Cities of Change*, created by most of the largest cities in Spain where broad coalitions of progressive forces and citizens movements won last year municipal election and are now governing those cities. The network operates as a stable space for policy coordination on several areas, ranging from housing and urban planning to social economy and open democracy.

In summary, European Union and EU governance are facing major challenges. Local governments are increasingly at the heart (SARACENO, 2002; SUBIRATS, 2002). Cities are stronger; urban regimes are more likely to channel political innovation in decisionmaking; and those stronger cities are generating international networks to reinforce their presence in multilevel governance and their own policy responses to global challenges.

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