Multilevel Governance and Social Cohesion: bringing back conflict and citizenship practices.

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Abstract:

This paper analyses the relationship between urban governance and social cohesion, stressing the relevance of multilevel policies as well as citizenship practices. It seeks to provide a critical understanding of social cohesion as a policy aim for European cities, seeing governance dynamics within the frame of the transformation of the state and the emergence of complex multi-scalar decision-making processes. Beginning with a review of the literature on the transformation of the state with regard to the emergence of a governance-based approach in policy practice, it then offers several examples of new modes of governance in different policy fields, stressing the relationship between governance and territorial cohesion as well as the need for context-sensitive analysis. Thirdly, it addresses the relevance of participatory democracy, social innovation and citizens' practices in fostering democracy, and argues that the analysis of governance should reincorporate the idea of conflict and counter-hegemonic citizenship practices.

Keywords: urban governance; social cohesion; multilevel policies; citizenship practices; social innovation.

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Introduction

City governance and social cohesion issues emerged in the urban literature of the 1990s associated with the impact of de-industrialization and globalization. Cities on both sides of the Atlantic were encouraged to assume responsibility for the regeneration of their urban economies, job creation and service implementation in the field of welfare and infrastructures.

In the USA, urban competition intensified to the extent that cities came to be regarded as "growth machines" (Logan and Molotch, 1987). As national welfare policies eroded, cities were encouraged - albeit to varying degrees - to became responsible for managing the emerging negative social consequences of economic transformation. The resulting scenario challenged the notion of citizenship based on nationality, and pointed towards social cohesion as a multidimensional objective to be pursued by cities.

In Europe, national urban policies were readjusted in terms of economic policies and state expenditures. Several challenges emerged. First, despite wealth creation and improved life conditions for the whole population; even the most economically successful cities experienced an increase in social fragmentation. A second challenge arose as European cities became more diverse, not only from the large numbers of foreign workers in cities (see Dukes and Musterd, 2012), but also from an increased division of labour, combined

with fragmentation of identities. The basic identification of labour markets with nation-states no longer holds in global labour markets; thus, individuals and groups have had to search for new forms of a sense of belonging. Thirdly, even if political rights are maintained – not always the case, given the large numbers of denizens – there has been a crisis of democratic participation. Innovative forms and strategies of participation which can include diversity of feelings of belongings seem to be at stake. Arguably, cities are a suitable scale for creating public spheres with greater accessibility to participation. Some authors proclaim the virtues of urban citizenship (Isin, 2000), which means rethinking ideas of governance. Other writers point out the multi-level character of governance and the public sphere (Garcia, 2006; Giersig, 2008). In short, new challenges have been incorporated into the urban agenda concerning governance and social cohesion: economic growth, policies against social fragmentation, accommodation of diversity, and demands for more democracy.

Policy responses to these challenges emerged in each country, informed not only by the political, economic and cultural traditions of each, but also – and in some cases mainly – by international organizations such as the World Bank, IMF, OECD, and, in Europe, the European Union. These institutions' recommendations were orientated towards a new approach to urban growth and policy-making. This approach consisted in the need to enhance competitiveness as well as to encourage the participation of civil society in processes of

decision-making. The aim: to overcome problems of "social exclusion and loss of social cohesion that follow the creation of socially segregated zones of poor people, often immigrants and within minorities in cities" (OECD, 2006, pp. 144-145).

The call by international organizations to implement policies to deal with externalities arising from the new wave of urban competitiveness required complex financial arrangements between city administrators, market agents and / or national governments. Thus, 'governance' has been used in political discourses to describe new ways of management based on consensus, including private agents, public administrations and civil society representatives.

A paradigm shift from government to governance was also incorporated in the academic urban literature to describe and analyse the complex transformation in policy-making. David Harvey was one of the first to point out that "the power to organize space derives from a whole complex of forces mobilized by diverse social agents" (Harvey, 1989, p. 4). Critical social scientists *unpacked* the 'concept' of "good governance" as a normative concept, defending its value as an analytical concept (Jessop, 2002). At the same time, governance defined as a process of coordinating actors, social groups and institutions to reach collectively discussed objectives raised the question of democratic legitimacy (Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2000, p. 26).

However, governance not only refers to "any form of coordination of interdependent social relations"; governance also involves "reflexive self-organization of interdependent actors" (Jessop, 2002, chapter 6). Institutions and organized citizens have engaged in the restructuring of different policy fields in various ways, not only following a normative top-down interpretation of governance. Neither does governance correspond to a monolithic interpretation rendering the use of the concept to promote social cohesion in the sense of achieving social harmony (Novy et al., 2012). On the contrary, we claim that the governance paradigm also includes "reflexive self-organization" of citizens who disagree with mainstream policy formulation and present alternative creative strategies constituting social innovation. Thus, innovation of governance through practices combining bottom-up initiatives with top-down policies is also part and parcel of contemporary urban transformations. In a recent study we have developed the term "bottom-linked" practices which combined social and institutional governance innovation (García et al, *forthcoming*). In this regard, this article includes literature analyzing the contribution of citizens' practices and their development networks in the pursuit of social justice. We want to highlight these contributions, not only because they help to carry out social cohesion policies, but also because they advance innovative governance. Our approach is therefore closer to Neo-Weberian analysis (Le Galès, 2002) that incorporates urban conflict (Mayer, 2003, 2009)

than to the discourse on social cohesion *versus* consensus. As Weber said, "cities are arenas for conflict", they are also arenas for advancing citizenship.

This article focuses mainly on the European literature analysing governance in terms of relationships and coordination mechanisms (a) between government and non-governmental actors; and (b) between the actors themselves, such as civil society and grass-roots movements. Both types of coordination mechanisms often relate to policy issues which may or may not enhance social cohesion. Moreover, the multi-scale institutional framework in which European cities are embedded reinforces coordination at different levels of government (multilevel governance), whereas the proliferation of transnational networks in several policy fields (transport, environment, etc.) reinforces network governance. The regulative role played by the European Union, and the financial support it provides for particular issues, involve a wide rage of governance dynamics, to the extent that it can be argued that Europe is an arena for governance experimentation. Such as creating opportunities for new governance arrangements at the local level, involving cooperation between market and civil society actors; developing coordination between multiple policy-making scales.

We first provide an overview of governance dynamics with a focus on Europe, looking at the ways in which these dynamics relate to the restructuring of the economy and the state. The reshaping of national and local public

finances is one of the key questions for local autonomy and responsibility over the social cohesion of cities. Section Two examines governance in relation to different policy fields, such as neighbourhoods, welfare, housing, education and mobility and the environment. All of these in one way or another involve social tensions, institutional dynamics and economic redistribution. This section also examines relationships between governance and territorial cohesion. As cities have sprawled, regional dynamics have demanded a redefinition of power relations and policy priorities. One of the current governance challenges, looking at territorial scale relationships, is how to generate strategic planning and consensus-building. Also, urban mobility inequalities may be seen as a consequence of neo-liberal governance discourse and as a subject for ecological approaches towards developing more territorial cohesion. Section Three focuses on how citizens participate in the public sphere and how transparency, participation and accountability may be guaranteed. The spheres for important decisions affecting cities are more diverse and fuzzy (companies, international institutions); however, participation mechanisms remain mainly linked to representative democracy. The issue is the extent to which representative and participatory democracies can be combined in a virtuous relationship in pursuit of social justice.

1. The emergence of 'governance': restructuring the state and the economy

The idea of a shift 'from government to governance' aims to synthesize the deep transformations of the state and the economy, a series of changes in statehood based on the emergence of complex multi-level decision-making processes. The term governance emerges both as an analytical and normative response to understand / foster these processes. Hence, governance has been a central concept not only in academic debates but also in policy discourses. Academic debates have focused on: (a) how these new forms of governance substitute Keynesian centralised decision-making, in which the main relevant actor was the central government (Jessop, 2002; Le Galès, 2002; Brenner, 2004) and (b) the consequences for democratic legitimacy (Novy et al., 2012; Swyngedouw, 2005).

In the US, governance is associated with urban regime analysis, treating economic policies, social policies and governance as interconnected phenomena, and the urban regime, where it exists, as the main instrument of political agency in a city (Stone, 2005; Garcia and Judd, *forthcoming*). In the UK, policy responses under the Thatcher government resembled the US inasmuch as they promoted public-private partnerships (PPPs), but not in its centralisation of public power and weakening of local autonomy. In Britain the

virtuous duo of competitiveness and governance developed, in the Blair years, into a triangle by adding social cohesion as the third pillar (Buck et al., 2005). Thus, whereas in the US academic literature has focused on urban regimes, European academic debates have developed the concept of governance coalitions and have focused on the structural changes of capitalism to explain the transformation towards local governance.

These structural changes are part of a larger process of reshaping of the states that is taking place globally, involving a diffusion of governmental functions into different spatial scales, not only sub-national but also supra-national. Departing from the regulation theory, several authors analyse this transformation from a historical perspective, from the existence of centralised national economies based on Keynesianism to multi-scalar nation-states with neo-liberal agendas. Outstanding works in this regard include Rhodes (1997), MacLeod (2001) Brenner (1999; 2004), Jessop (2002; 2004), Bache and Flinders (2004), Blatter (2004; 2006) or Le Galès (2002). Following a structuralist perspective, most of these authors see the state as a process. The transformation towards complex, multi-level forms of statehood does not mean a weakness of the state but its adaptation to the changing needs of capital. As Jessop (2002) stresses, market and state are closely interlinked and interdependent. Whereas under Keynesianism there were national strategies to foster industrial capitalist growth in the whole territory, in the post-Fordist era

sub-national governments (regional and local) have started to develop their own growth strategies. This trend is reinforced by supranational institutions pushing for regional and local economic growth. In this context, local governments seek new sources of capital investing increasingly in economic development. Furthermore, depending on the national context, some regions develop their own systems of redistribution of resources. This process generates increasing territorial and social inequality as well as new forms of poverty. Furthermore, it promotes competitiveness between cities and regions.

The process of decentralisation has been uneven across continental Europe. Depending on the national context and the historical background, cities have gained more or less autonomy and competences. Several authors (Le Galès, 2002; Keating 1998) stress the importance of the national and local institutional context in understanding the ability of local actors to organize collectively and to develop local forms of regulation that drive towards the relevance of the city in governance frameworks. From a Neo-Weberian perspective, these authors emphasize the role of individual and collective actors at local level in the overall transformation of the state, and stress the fact that European cities are embedded in different national governance structures, with different allocation of competences and resources. These differences have increased territorial disparities, and explain why some cities in Western Europe have become powerful as political authorities, and play a remarkable role in the

international markets, whereas other cities are neither politically nor economically powerful (Giersig, 2008, p. 43; Le Galès, 2000, pp. 21-22). The role of cities has differed depending on elements such as the national tradition regarding centralisation or the welfare regime. In northern and central Europe, municipalities assumed more responsibilities and management of resources. In southern European countries, especially in Spain, decentralisation was not accompanied by a redistribution of public resources from central to local administrations (Garcia, 2006). For example, Spain has an average municipal expenditure of €1000 per capita, whereas in Sweden or the United Kingdom this expenditure is between 3000 and 4000 € (Wollman, 2009). Moreover, a large proportion of public resources come from local taxation (Urban Audit, 2007).

In a milder version of US partnerships, European cities have used public-private partnerships as solutions to shrinking public funding (Moulaert et al, 2003). Discourses favouring PPP strategies have been politically justified by conservative government actors with reference to the inefficiency of hierarchical bureaucratic states, and left-wing governments that questioned the autocratic character of the state and promoted the incorporation of civil society into the design and implementation of policies.

As previously mentioned, the response of several transnational institutions to emerging inequalities in the Post-Keynesian era was to recommend 'good

governance'. Focusing on former practices developed at local level that involved the participation of private and societal actors in the decision-making, they have promoted a normative view on good governance for cities and regions. The World Bank (1992), the OECD (1995), the United Nations (1997) or the European Commission (2001, 2003) developed and consolidated the concept in their reports and recommendations. Although their visions of 'good governance' are slightly different, all of them have a clear commitment to economic liberalization and the creation of regulations with the intervention of the state, without having to withdraw the arguments against state intervention (Abrahamsen, 2000; Leubolt et. al. 2009). For these institutions, a governance approach corrects the defects of excessive government intervention and *market failures*. As Novy et al. point out in this Issue (Novy et al., 2012), the combination of competitiveness and social cohesion was the key objective of the Lisbon agenda in 2000 for the next ten years. Nevertheless, in the EU approach social cohesion is subordinated to the interests of competitiveness (Geddes and Bennignton, 2001).

Thus, while the restructuring of the Post-Keynesian state was under way, multilevel governance became the generalized method for coordinating policies in urban Europe. In this regard, the EU plays a key role, promoting the development of new governance approaches at local level and funding projects and initiatives for local development. EU funds directed at regional and urban

development mean more opportunities for cities to obtain public resources. Behind these programmes is the aim of fostering territorial and social cohesion within the EU.

European analysts have adopted broader conceptions of governance that consider the ways in which governments incorporate "a diversification and proliferation of politically relevant coalitions" composed of state and non-state actors. This governance perspective emphasizes "processes and mechanisms through which significant and resource-full actors coordinate their actions and resources in the pursuit of collective defined objectives" (Pierre, 2005, p. 452). European scholars have also critically assessed the "urban regime analysis", partly because this concept assumes strong private sector intervention, partly because there is little presence of the national state. Instead, in Europe – they argued - national financial and regulatory structures play strong role (Le Galès, 2002, 2005; Kazepov, 2005). The main policy narrative in European cities relates competitiveness to overcoming social fragmentation and emphasizes governance and social cohesion (Harding, 1997). Moreover, empirical research shows that governance coalitions in European cities are multilevel, and policies are financed by complex systems of public resources from national and regional institutions as well as by PPPs (Salet and Gualini, 2007; Kantor and Savitch, 2002; Garcia and Judd, *forthcoming).* From these perspectives, cities are part of multi-level governance frameworks in which the local level can have different

roles depending on both the role of local actors and national decisions. The key element for this perspective is the study of connectivity between different levels of power (Griesig, 2008, p. 53).

2. Multilevel governance: territorial and context-sensitive analysis.

Multi-level governance has become a key institutional framework for policy implementation in European cities. Governance dynamics involve interactions between institutional and non-institutional actors, who operate with particular sets of values. Some societies have a strong redistributive culture whereas others do not. In this section we look briefly at social cohesion in relation to neighbourhood policies as well as welfare, housing, education, mobility and environment policies. All of these involve some kind of economic redistribution and therefore affect citizens' life chances; they also operate to enhance social cohesion, albeit not without social and political tensions. Several approaches have developed concerning social cohesion (Novy et al, 2012). For example, theories on social capital have emerged as a way to explain the role of social networks in generating social cohesion through empowering excluded populations and helping them to participate in economic growth as well as in political decision-making. Although the use of social capital in policy discourses ignores notions of power and domination (Mayer, 2003), there is

wide scope for recapturing the concept for social cohesion analysis and multilevel governance.

Governance of policies towards social cohesion can be observed through relational and cultural dimensions (Vranken, 2005). The relational dimension refers to social networks including strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) that reinforce life chances of individuals within their society. The cultural dimension includes identification with a group and shared values in a common space. The 'sense of belonging' can be understood as a combination of these two dimensions and is influenced by external and internal forces. In this regard, internal attitudes and external constraints can influence social cohesion. The exclusion of some individuals and groups can generate intra-cohesion, which can mean that social exclusion and social cohesion are not contradictory but complementary (Vranken, 2005, p. 261). The question is how to create institutional mechanisms to reinforce the relational dimension outside the intra-group dynamics. One way is to implement policies and practices strengthening that reinforce citizens' sense of belonging, allowing them to participate in civic life and to obtain resources of different kinds. For example, area-based development programmes implemented all over the urban European Union at neighbourhood level have to a large extent involved housing renewal and the provision of neighbourhood services. Research has been carried out, with a new analytical insight, on these programs and the way different citizens' groups and

individuals participate in them and the extent to which this has promoted social cohesion and limited social exclusion patterns (Andersen and Van Kempen, 2001; Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2005). Behind these approaches lies the assumption that neighbourhoods and communities play an important role in everyday life, and that social segregation is detrimental to social cohesion because it reproduces and amplifies the existing structure of inequalities, and even generates new inequalities (Harvey, 1979; Cheshire, 2006; Musterd, 2006) [1]. However other studies have pointed out the limitations of the area-based approach to reduce social inequalities (Darcy, 2010; Lupton and Tunstall, 2008)

Social and economic changes appear differently depending on the urban context but the social and spatial impact of increasing inequalities is sharp and obvious in most cities of the world. European cities, where social inequalities and segregation are also on the increase, are affected by how the welfare states are changing. One such way has been the rescaling of welfare policies, where the local dimension has become reinforced. This means a change of the current configuration of welfare systems towards a mix between central, regional and urban government. The control of national governments in order to guarantee equal access to social protection for every citizen has been blurred into a new way of proceeding in which the local actors have a strong role in the design and implementation process. Thus, the restructuring of welfare policies has forced local authorities to develop new governance instruments in order to integrate

local development agencies, for-profit and non-profit enterprises, banking foundations, mutual aid networks, social cooperatives, or voluntary associations, amongst others. However, the way civil society actors become stakeholders in governance dynamics varies across Europe. In some countries, contributions by civil society and market actors to policy implementation are regulated through strict and formal concrete guidelines. This is the case with private providers and family care-drivers in Scandinavian countries (Pfau-Effinger et al., 2009). In Southern European countries market social services have developed spontaneously, for example in domestic care services, provided by informally hired and poorly paid immigrants (Andreotti et al., 2012). Research on welfare rescaling shows that social cohesion cannot be achieved without a public regulatory framework through which citizens' social rights may be effectively guaranteed throughout society (Kazepov, 2008). As has been pointed out, when the rescaling process is not accompanied by common standards and financial resources provided by central states, local policies are more dependent on local fiscal policies and the discretionary power of local administrations and on the advocacy capacity of civil society actors.

Closely related to welfare is the privatisation and rescaling of housing systems. Most accept that there has been a shift away from less direct provision and policy direction of housing by the state to a more fragmented and neo-liberal market-based model across Europe (Cameron et al, 2012). In most EU

countries the state's role in providing access to affordable housing has changed significantly since the 1960s. As in other policy fields, the provision of affordable housing has become constrained by a reduction of public finance (Ball, 2009). Moreover, an increasingly multi-level and multi-actor process has developed, involving different layers of government (national, regional and local) as well as private (profit and non-profit) actors. For example, in the provision of social housing, the sector has moved towards more contractual relationships between the commissioning authority and increasingly independent providers. The emphasis has shifted to regulation and risk management (EUROFOUND, 2006). Overall, in response to all these changes in policy, market and societal environment, social housing companies are broadening the scope of their activities to improve efficiency and accountability. As Cameron et al. remind us, privatization of housing systems has negative impacts on people's well-being and social cohesion within and between neighbourhoods. For example, the shift towards self-regulated housing mechanisms has fuelled social and ethnic segregation as well as racial and class conflicts in many European cities (Cameron et al., 2012).Hegemonic discourses on housing have promoted social mixing as a way to combat social segregation through market mechanisms. Nevertheless, policies based on social diversification of neighbourhoods do not necessarily lead to an increase of social mobility in such neighbourhoods (Arbaci and Rae, 2010)

In the field of education, Green, Leney and Wolf (1999) show the causes of restructuring and decentralising: the financial overburden of the welfare state, the need to rationalise highly bureaucratised educational systems, the increase of social pluralism, the demand for more freedom of choice or the adoption of new public management ideologies and neo-liberal models of market economy. Paradoxically this decentralisation often involves centralised benchmarks defined by the state (Power, 2007). Moreover, the introduction of external accountability mechanisms fragments the educational system, generates local competitive systems, increasing isolation and diminishing cooperation between schools (Whitty et al., 1998). If these mechanisms are accompanied by fewer financial resources for schools, innovation and diversity in didactic projects disappear. A sole model of traditional results-centred school is reinforced. These types of reform clearly improve the performance of privileged social groups to the detriment of many other social groups. One consequence is that social and ethnic segregation increases and is extended to schools that previously were integrated in mixed (ethnic and class) neighbourhoods (Martínez-Celorrio, 2003).

Against this background, André et al. (2012) stress the promotion of the learning region as a strategy for addressing socially cohesive educational policies at the local level. They argue that a learning city or region mobilizes resources in every sector to develop and enrich human potential for the

fostering of personal growth, the maintenance of social cohesion and the creation of prosperity (Longworth, 2006). Because of this, "learning cities & regions" seek to be structured in networks *via* effective collaboration among local governments, local agencies, schools, universities, stakeholders and businesses in multi-level governance and flexible interdependences. Following Moulaert and Sekia (2003) a "learning region" can be understood as a form of territorial innovation model, based on networks between local actors for the economic and social development of a territory. These models have already appeared in the past, translated in different national contexts into "industrial districts", "innovative milieus", "localized production systems", "new industrial spaces" or "clusters of innovation". But the prevalence of "a narrow and economic determined notion of the learning city" has limited its potentially positive impact on social cohesion (André et al., 2012).

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, key multi-level governance challenges to social and territorial cohesion have developed in city regions concerning mobility and the environment. One such challenge is the coordination of transport systems. In this Special Issue, Miciukiewicz and Vigar stress that policy agendas for socially cohesive transport are being discussed at various scales from local to city, national and European level. This is often done through scenario development and tests using best practice examples, particularly on the local and city scales, proposing packages of policy

procedures to local, municipal and regional administrations. The problem with these policy recommendations is that little attention is given to the dynamics of context and the possibility of transferability. Therefore, the influence of the EU in defining national transport policies is still not evidence-based. Furthermore, despite defining key principles for supporting public transport, little attention is given within European policy recommendations to the polarisation of mobility opportunities. In fact these policy recommendations seem to be widening the possibilities for the mobility-rich without improving the needs of those mobility systems more oriented to an under-privileged population (Miciukiewicz and Vigar, 2012).

Inequalities in mobility systems are related to environmental justice inasmuch as both areas require a strong state role for socio-ecological cohesion. Regarding a growth-oriented neo-liberal market system that supports a managerial governance principle, environmental justice and urban political ecology studies show that the role of formal state institutions in decision-making and market regulation on crucial environment themes is still important and needs to be further researched. It is a central argument of this paper that the incorporation into governance of new actors embodying 'self-regulation' policies – often with a marketization of services – poses questions for democracy and accountability. This becomes clear in relation to environmental issues, where extra-local networks and governance processes that constitute and

determine the urban metabolism happen far away from local actors. The contradictions and fractures that these networks may cause in the pursuit of environmental justice are difficult to counteract for local grass-roots activists who utilise material and discursive scalar strategies as well as lobbying to advance in their struggles, while extra-local processes are actively shaping urban localized injustices (Swyngedouw and Cook, 2012).

3. **The new urban borders of citizenship: deepening the participative debate**

It is commonly accepted that the claims and practices promoted by civil society organisations working in the field of advocacy inspire the rethinking of citizenship in significance and scope. In particular, advocacy practices (e.g. migrant support groups) are underlining current contradictions in the traditional conception of citizenship based on nation-states in a migratory world (Issin, 2002; Sassen, 2003). Marshalian theory was built on the basis of the nation-states definition of citizenship. Nowadays this has been challenged by cross-border identities and solidarities (cosmopolitan or transnational) (Issin and Turner, 2007). Thus, issues of boundaries and exclusivity of access to citizenship may be treated as the desirable goal of urban social cohesion. For example, the claim of the 'right to the city' and rights derived from residence as

the possible focus of political belonging, overcomes the limits of nation-based citizenship (Bauböck, 2003; García, 1996; Holston, 1999; Issin, 2000; Penninx 2004).

The question is how to govern new borders of citizenship and at the same time enhance social cohesion without renouncing diverse societal views and interests. Urban and regional citizenship analysis stresses governance as the arena in which local and regional governments can play a key role in the production of substantive rights and specific obligations with place (Bauböck, 2003; Desforges, 2005; Garcia, 2006). However, the problem of who belongs to the community continues to be a challenge for local governments, given their limited capacity for defining political rights. For instance, the right of migrants to vote is becoming a matter in policy agendas, especially in cities dealing with migration and with the social cohesion challenges thus generated. Moreover, as shown above, social citizenship, understood as welfare redistribution allowing inclusion in the standards of life for all the members of a society, has been assumed by sub-national and local scales. The challenge for multilevel governance is how citizenship entitlements at sub-national levels could be reflected in a multilevel public sphere and what the influence of active citizens for social justice is.

Research on participatory forms of decision-making has been institutionally supported by hegemonic institutions which have encouraged

local administrations to include citizens in policy-making (OECD, 2001, World Bank, 1992; European Commission, 2001; 2003). Consequently, innovation in governance through participatory and deliberative practices has been given some attention by policy makers as well as scholars in the last decade (Beaumont, 2008; Bifulco, 2008; Blanco, 2003; Gbikpi, 2002). Two complementary views can be observed in the current literature on democratic participation. The first focuses primarily on participatory democracy, analysing how institutions affect the participation of people, linking democratisation with inclusion in participatory structures (Blanco, 2003). The second argues that participation is only possible when there are critically conscious communities and when it is possible to freely define and develop those political identities that emerge in the margins of the public sphere (Mayer, 2003, 2009). In this case the focus is on the nature and quality of deliberation.

The first approach assumes that plural actors can achieve a rational consensus on certain issues through meaningful and egalitarian communication. It also stresses that institutional forms of traditional liberal democracy need innovative schemes to achieve a more coherent public sphere involving diverse citizens in policy decision-making. Assessing a stronger role for secondary associations, this perspective has been linked to 'associational pluralism', which stresses the importance of associations in encouraging grass-roots active participation in politics (Cohen, 1995; Hirst, 2000; Smyth, 2004).

Many see the public sphere as a context in which well-designed participatory institutions serve to enhance fruitful communication and coherent consensus when there is a relative balance between stakeholders (Beaumont and Nichols, 2008). The other perspective, which does not necessary exclude the assumptions of the previous one (and viceversa), focuses on the implications of achieving rational consensus, stressing the idea that there may be too much emphasis on the need of consensus within participatory devices. Analysing how participatory institutions can be designed to create conditions of 'free' speech, some authors focus on the process of deliberation (Fung, 2004; Melo, 2006). Nonetheless, as these authors point out, radical democracy should allow political subjects to exert multiple identities in a conflictive polity. This critique assumes that where there is consensus, there is also a silenced margin, and therefore, it is better to recognize and respect conflict and difference as normal parts of the participative process. From this perspective, 'talk-centric democratic theory replaces voting-centric democratic theory while accountability replaces consent as conceptual core categories' (Chambers, 2003 in Gaventa, 2006, p.18)

This kind of analysis questions the way in which under-privileged communities articulate their interests in politics. Some scholars have emphasised the 'Janus-faced' nature of governance beyond the state (Swyngedouw, 2005). In western capitalist societies, for instance, some

initiatives labelled 'new participatory arrangements' have marked a fundamental shift from collective and corporatist negotiations between class blocks to fragmented forms of negotiation (Beaumont and Nicholls, 2008, p. 90).

The way in which the national institutional context is crucial in the definition and the effects of participatory methodologies has also been an important theme in the contemporary study of participatory governance. Recalling the experience of participatory budgeting developed in Porto Alegre (Brazil) since 1989, some authors have discussed the possible 'transfer' of this innovative methodology (Abers, 2000; Avritzer, 2006; Fung and Wright, 2003). In this regard, the literature on democracy and participatory governance has noticed that where the participatory process has been set up by institutions (defining the agenda, controlling the process etc.) results have been very poor (Beaumont and Nicholls, 2008). Even the virtuous combination of representative and bottom-up participative democracy advocated by Santos (2005) has proved unsustainable in cases like Porto Alegre.

4. Socially creative strategies deepening democracy

How much can a reflexive civil society contribute to urban governance and the deepening of democracy through formal and informal citizenship practices? We

may look at the different modes of knitting the fabric of civil society, assuming the idea that a robust civil society can serve a watchdog role and exercise a countervailing power. In this kind of analysis, the concern is how an independent civil society holds government to account, and not on how civil society participates in process of co-governance.

From an institutionalist approach, analysis has shown how socially creative strategies promoted by civil society, although path dependent, can generate social innovation (Gerometta et al., 2005; González and Healey, 2005; Moulaert et al., 2007; Garcia et al., *forthcomming*). The specific roles of actors, their capacity to organize and define problems and strategies, as well as the ways they interact within different welfare and governance regimes, are a way to redirect research on governance and social cohesion. Within specific regimes, power relations between actors are contingent to features of national, regional and local contexts.

A context-sensitive multilevel analysis clarifies how in some cases civil society can institutionalise its own action in order to improve socially inclusive governance dynamics, while in other cases civil society can try to construct counter-hegemonic movements against the current consensus. As recent secondary research has shown (KATARSIS)[2], multilevel governance can define ways of promoting sustainability of socially creative strategies (Garcia, et al *forthcoming*). Moreover, new terms are emerging, such as 'bottom-linked'

socially creative strategies (Novy et al., 2012), to refer to experiences which promote social innovation, dealing with the satisfaction of material and non-material needs and contributing to a better redistribution of resources, combining the action of public administrations with those arising from local citizens' initiatives.

As Fraisse states in this Special Issue (Fraisse, 2012), local governments, as well as international institutions, have not paid attention during the last two decades to the potential offered by grass-roots initiatives in terms of job creation, local development, and social cohesion. This is only beginning to be recognised by official urban policies now, with the financial crisis. However, there is no consensual definition of what grass-roots initiatives mean and how to understand the role of urban social movements in governance dynamics (Mayer, 2003, 2009). The development of a perspective on a plural economy and social innovation with plural forms of entrepreneurship is under way, adding complexity to this problematique. New alliances for employment are being formed, bringing together community groups, market oriented initiatives, and local government agencies (Nyssens, 2006).

However, it remains difficult to restrict the scope of civil society initiatives at the local scale. Although it is easiest to identify how civil society organisations are tackling social exclusion at this scale, there are other second and third rank organisations representing the interests of civil society initiatives

that operate at other geographical scales. This is indicative of the raising consciousness on interdependency between administrative scales, but also of differential, an unequal consciousness and adaptation thereof.

Finally, considering what can urban studies offer to local practitioners dealing with these themes it is necessary to bear in mind the fact that there is a lack of standardised figures on local initiatives (and grass-roots practices) due to their slippery conceptualisation. As a matter of fact, the impact of local creative strategies on democratic governance and social cohesion deserves empirical analysis in terms of the quantity and quality of jobs created (when we look at social enterprises), civic commitments and citizens' participation (analysing urban social movements), governing diversity and so on.

Conclusion

As many authors have pointed out, blurring concepts such as governance, social cohesion or social capital have been used to explain the role of non-economic factors in economic development. The hegemonic discourse on urban development has also applied these concepts as relevant factors to reorganize social exclusion trajectories and to build up channels for urban social inclusion of individuals and families, but in many senses these debates have been used to alter the course of the discussion from social justice deficits, which still remain

active at the aggregate level. In this article we have pointed out that policy discourses on governance and social cohesion often ignore power relations, territorial fragmentation and access to social rights. We argue that it is required to recapture conflict as well as multilevel and territorial governance analysis in assessing how cities are currently dealing with urban social cohesion.

Despite the optimistic views of the policy discourses on governance, the relationship between governance and social cohesion is neither direct nor automatic. As has been stated, even though the discourse on 'good governance' has a global character, its implementation has brought different results, depending not only on the national context and the transformation of the relevant welfare regime but also on the role of local actors in this process. In this regard, as we have seen, depending on the country, we can find different processes of welfare rescaling with different consequences in terms of social cohesion. Moreover, this process of welfare rescaling is not homogeneous in terms of policy fields, given that local actors play a key role in the development of policies.

Thus, the path-dependent, contextual configuration of urban governance can bring social cohesion, but it can also bring rising social inequalities. Normative discourses on governance operate with the idea of consensus as a way to avoid conflict. In a similar way, the concept of social cohesion, as it is used, often refers to the idea of sharing spaces without conflict, despite the

existing social and cultural differences (Body-Grendot and Martinello, 2000). However, conflict is part of social life, and these conflicts must be analysed to understand the relationship between governance and social cohesion (Young, 1990). In this regard, as has been stated, societal actors develop and maintain strategies to challenge hegemonic consensus on different issues. Often, the objective of these initiatives is not only to obtain material or immaterial resources for the excluded, but also to redefine norms and values that remain behind the causes of exclusion. The claims for a redefinition of the notion of citizenship are clearly along these lines.

In this regard, because they are not often considered issues in the literature of governance, this article has tried to summarize citizenship challenges, participatory governance and social innovation fostering democracy. The challenges in terms of entitlements and new geographies of citizenship in which cities could play a significant role, as well as the growing interest on citizen's participation or the increasingly recognised role of civil society initiatives in the fight against social exclusion, involve new challenges for urban studies. These are mainly the development of critical assessment, in qualitative and quantitative terms, of respect for and development of citizenship rights, the balance between representative and participative democracy and the achievement of the aims of social initiative. This is a challenging comparative urban research agenda, needed to overcome the slippery definitions of the

different families of local initiatives, as well as types of citizens' engagement and their achievements in terms of social cohesion.

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1. In particular the discussion has been organized around the existence of "neighbourhood effects" (Andersson et al., 2007; Blasius and Friedrichs, 2007; Buck, 2001; Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Gijsberts and Dagevos, 2007; Ostendorf et al., 2001). While the American literature emphasizes the influence of neighbourhood effects on socialization, the structure of opportunity and integration, European literature has been more critical of the term's true relevance in European cities.

2. KATARSIS is a Coordinated Action under 6th FP which analyses Alternative Knowledge and Practices in Overcoming Social Exclusion in Europe.