

The island councils of the Canary Islands: a challenge for regional governance?

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ENG Abstract. This work will address the existing problems in the Canary Islands through its particular form of institutional organization. The Island Councils as the highest political bodies of the island, have played an important role in the historical development of the Canary Islands, in some cases as mechanisms for resolving the so-called Canarian problem and, in others, as elements that empower the island itself. This has led to a confrontation between the community/regional element and the insular space. Through the empirical analysis of the valuations in the provision of public services provided by the different administrations in the archipelago, it will be observed what value Canarian society gives to the insular space, and whether there are substantial differences with respect to the autonomous space.

Keywords: Canary Islands; Island Councils; governance; insularism; Canarian problem.

Summary: 1. Introduction; 2. From the Cabildos to the Island Councils and their influence on the so-called Canarian problem; 3. The governance of the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands since 1983; 3.1. Some indicators on governance in the Canary Islands; 4. Hypothesis; 5. Results; 6. Conclusions.

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1. Introduction

The uniqueness of the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands is based on its archipelagic character made up of eight inhabited islands² and its geographical position far from the European continent. The differential fact in Spain (or differential facts), as Villar and Betancort (2000:162) point out, it is understood as the “political, economic, social, institutional or cultural circumstances that justify an identity of its own, different from the common state identity, on which to articulate a different legal treatment, and that in the case of the Canary Islands are linked around the island as a geographical, political, legal, social and economic unit. He insular fact It would not only represent the primordial geography that constitutes the archipelago, but also the main element of Canarian society that throughout its history has led to contradictions and tensions regarding island-region congruence (Ramírez, 1996; 2004).

These contradictions have been resolved formally through institutions that could play a relevant role in the islands themselves and, in turn, converge with others at the community level or regional. This is the germ of the Canarian Cabildos, island government organizations that tried to resolve the problems derived from a regional centralism seen from certain islands as the main impediment to their development and progress. Islands, in particular, maintain different dynamics from each other, therefore, they need institutions that help organize and manage their governance. This is an important issue, since the progress derived from island political action and management makes the island empower itself and claim greater presence and autonomy at the regional level. This problem is the workhorse of the Canary archipelago, a region that since its incorporation into the Kingdom of Castile until the promulgation of the Statute of Autonomy of the Canary Islands in 1982 (EACan) has been involved in permanent contradictions between the presence of the Island Councils and the own Autonomous Community.

This article aims to address this problem by focusing on the progress that the Island Councils have been making in the context of regional governance in the Canary Islands. Likewise, it seeks to observe and contrast the existence of these contradictions in Canarian society through the assessment of the public services provided by the main public administrations, as well as what degree of importance the *island sand*³ in contrast to other local and regional spaces.

Thus, this study will be structured as follows.

Firstly, it will approach the history and origin of the Cabildos in the Canarian institutional framework from the European conquest to the Franco authoritarian period. Next, governance in the Canary Islands will be addressed taking as a starting point the Spanish Constitution of 1978 (CE) and the EACan of 1982. In the same way, attention will be paid to various evaluative indices of governance in the archipelago, as well as to the opinions that citizens maintain on public institutions. Finally, it closes with the most notable conclusions.

2. From the Cabildos to the Island Councils and their influence on the callcanary problem

From very early on, the political-administrative configuration of the Canary Islands was characterized by insular fact and the ways in which the conquest process was carried out during almost the entire 15th century⁴. On the one hand, the islands of Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, El Hierro and La Gomera were conquered by feudal lords, which led to them being subject to a lordship regime by which the lords appropriated the lands and, later, ceded them to settlers in exchange for money and products (Lobo and Martínez de Lagos, 2003:144). On the other hand, Great Canaria, Tenerife and La Palma were subjugated by the Kingdom of Castile through the royal conquest system, giving full powers to a governor to appoint political and administrative positions through agreements called capitulations (de la Rosa, 1969:27). However, and in both cases, the institutional configuration that was established in the course of colonization was aimed at the establishment of Councils or Cabildos, organizations that had their territorial jurisdiction on the island itself, giving rise to a municipal organization of a municipality per island, although with nuances between them (Lobo, 1999:156). In the islands of lordship, the Cabildo functioned as an

¹ For example, for Moreno (1997:26) the *differential fact* It is understood as a trait or set of traits that differentiates it from other ethnic groups or communities. For a broader view on the topic, see (López, 1997).

² Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, Gran Canaria, Tenerife, La Gomera, La Palma and El Hierro. The new Statute of Autonomy of the Canary Islands approved in 2018 recognizes the island of La Graciosa as the eighth Canary Island.

³ The concept of “*island sand*” as a political-electoral space differentiated from the municipal, regional and state.

⁴ The conquest of the islands by Europeans began in 1402 with the conquest of Lanzarote, and ended in 1496 with the subjugation of the island of Tenerife.

administration transmitting the decisions of the lord and as a body collecting income, taxes and sales of products. For its part, in the royal islands the Cabildo was considered the highest institution of the island, and belonging to the same Crown that appointed its officials. Thus, each island represented a differentiated unit with disparate economic and social rhythms where the dominant classes did not compete among themselves, but were satisfied with their insular territorial reach (Pérez, 2004: 409).

However, these Cabildos or Councils were not established *sui generis* for the Canary Islands. Rather, they had their antecedents in the medieval and reconquest period as they were assemblies of settlers that were formed in the lands recovered from the Muslims (Abreu, 1986:253). In the same way, in the archipelago these assemblies exercised their main function, ensuring and maintaining the established regime and imposing laws and regulations in a context of remoteness and insularity that forced them to have a greater margin of autonomy than their peninsular counterparts. As Abreu (1986: 255) points out, the first Cabildos had as their main functions: 1) distribution of land and water; 2) water channeling and supply; 3) market regulation; 4) fix the location of hospitals and lazarettos; 5) control the population in case of epidemics; 6) maintenance of military defense and castles; 7) construction and maintenance of roads and ports; 8) regulate the construction of mills; 9) encourage the settlement of new settlers; 10) collect taxes.

This genuine administrative structure was in force until the 18th century but, especially, until the liberal period of the 19th century when all previous institutions were suppressed in order to establish a French-style municipal territorial organization. The model that was forged in Cádiz with the Constitution of 1812, which in a certain way sought a balance between progressive liberals and traditionalists, tended to incorporate a new local administrative conception, the province, with a strong decision-making capacity through the provincial councils. (Rodríguez, 2014: 9). In the case of the Canary Islands, the incorporation of these institutional structures meant the abolition of its peculiar administrative framework, with the Cabildos being the main victims when they were established after the *Royal Decree of Javier de Burgos of November 30, 1833* the Province of the Canary Islands with the Provincial Council of the Canary Islands as main jurisdictional body⁵. The fact of having a regional political and bureaucratic body for the first time in the archipelago meant that the capital of the new province was made official in Santa Cruz de Tenerife. Consequently, the Canary Islands went from a political structure of an insular nature, where the presence and autonomy of the islands through the Cabildos was unquestionable, to a provincialization that represented a type of *internal centralism* in favor of the island of Tenerife (Millares, 2007).

The creation of the *Province of the Canary Islands* He did not have a smooth journey. Santa Cruz de Tenerife would concentrate more and more power by hosting institutional centers, training its bourgeoisie to manage political control and influence with the State, bringing them, as a consequence, benefits and concessions for their island (Pérez, 2004:411).

Furthermore, and as Millares (2007) points out, in the Provincial Council an insularist chamber was established "that never opted for proportionality and balance." This fact sponsored the tension of the other island elites, mainly those of Gran Canaria, who viewed the power of Tenerife with suspicion. The conflict was called the *canary problem* (Pérez, 1912) or *island lawsuit* (Guimerá, 1967), a constant confrontation between the two largest islands of the archipelago in struggle for control of internal and external trade and hegemony within the province itself⁶.

But if we look closely at the root of the problem, the fact that the island personality lacked meaning at that time (since the islands were simply made up of municipalities without influence to claim joint needs) caused new organizational alternatives to be thought of. territorial or joint to the provincial system. In a famous text by the republican and Legal Official of the Council of State Pedro Pérez, dated 1910 and titled *The canary problem*, it is argued: "the Provincial Council cannot fulfill this mission (*that of channeling the demands of the municipalities of all the islands*), because the insular personality itself will always remain unattended, requiring continuous, momentary attention on the ground, keeping the insular interests that seek that reflective and immediate organization, within the same territory in which they offer themselves, remaining dissolved, because they are spontaneous in themselves. already organized within the own limits of each one through its respective soil. Since insular personality is a fact, it must also be a right" (2007 [1910]).

That is to say, what is proposed is the creation of an organization that coordinates and manages island action, given that the fragmentation and isolation that the islands suffer from both with regarding the territory peninsular as well as between themselves. The municipalities, lacking powers beyond their boundaries, could not address issues of vital importance to the island's inhabitants such as commerce, health or common services. For its part, the Provincial Council, in the heat of the helplessness that the State provided to the provincial entities, could not manage and provide minimal services and infrastructure to the municipalities, causing difficult situations of public order and popular dissatisfaction. It is for this reason, and due to the growing pressure of the bourgeoisie of Gran Canaria, which at first claimed the seats of the province for itself and, later, fought for its separation, that in 1912 the first Law was approved

⁵ Mention that the Town Councils were replaced by the constitutional Town Councils due to art. 310 of the Constitution of 1812.

⁶ The beginning of this conflict can be dated to 1808 after the creation of a Supreme Government Board with a Captain General on the island of Tenerife. In contrast to this, in Gran Canaria a Permanent General Council is created in an attempt at autonomy and hegemonic competition towards Tenerife.

that articulated and created the Cabildos as a mechanism to solve the entrenchment *island lawsuit*⁷ but, at the same time, maintaining the *status quo* provincial in order to satisfy the divisionist sector (Gran Canaria) and centralist sector (Tenerife).

On July 11, 1912, the Law of Island Councils materialized with its subsequent Regulations in October of that same year⁸. These institutions, inspired by the old Councils, took matters from the municipalities and the Province in a clear attempt to reflect the geographical and social reality of the island. According to Gironés, this Law meant “the legal birth, or if you want, the legal recognition of the Island as an authentic local Entity, located, as has been said, on a plane of interference, in the manner of a communication organization of the Municipalities with the Province and of impetus regarding purely municipal activities” (1952: 35).

However, the Island Councils were not free from problems in their beginnings⁹. On the one hand, the congruence of municipal and provincial functions in a single body became complicated, since the island governments claimed total autonomy of their functions; On the other hand, the Provincial Council was not willing to give up its powers, considering that this would lead to political ostracism and total questioning of its existence. Following the *Provisional regulations for the regime of the Island Councils of the Canary Islands* In October 1912, the autonomy of the smaller islands was increased, causing the structuring of the province into seven differentiated spaces with a decrease in the influence of Tenerife and the capacity of Gran Canaria to carry out its ambitious provincial division.

Unlike in the rest of the State, where the regional issue was gaining strength partly due to Catalan pressure, in the Canary Islands litigation monopolization continued, now with an insular bourgeoisie that took over the entire administration of its public affairs.

According to Ramírez, the new Island Councils were responsible for: “the matters of their power and exclusive competence, governing and administering peculiar interests of the respective islands, in particular as regards the creation and conservation of services whose purpose is the comfort of its inhabitants and the promotion of their moral and material interests. These are: charitable and educational establishments, local roads, irrigation canals and all kinds of public works of general interest, and all matters attributed by the Provincial Law to the Provincial Councils, as appropriate and peculiar to each of the Islands” (1996:279).

In the liberal model, the Cabildos came to provide a new conception not established in the Constitution of 1812, where legal uniformity was seen with certain problems when it came to assimilating this new step between the municipal and provincial (Ramírez, 1996). But, at the same time, it was interpreted as an opportunity to solve the stagnation of the country's constitutional unity (Cioranescu, 1988). This fact led to issues relating to the Canary Islands being able to be resolved between the elites of each island and the Government without the need for intermediation from the Provincial Council, which was increasingly diminished by the action of island autonomy.

Still in the dictatorship *primo riveris* the *canary problem* continued to dominate the news of the islands. Firstly, thanks to the efforts of the Councils to be the main institutions in providing services, leaving the Provincial Council without significance; and, secondly, given the pressure from the Gran Canaria elite to bring about the desired division. Finally, in 1925 the Provincial Council was abolished and the separation of the province was carried out, forcing the creation, after the Statute that qualified it, of an inter-island Commonwealth formed by members of the respective Island Councils, institutions that now gathered all the power of the archipelago.

During the periods of the Second Republic and Franco's dictatorship there were no substantial variations in the Canarian administrative regime. In any case, the island entities were further strengthened when they were recognized in the 1931 Constitution, which in its article 10 established: “in the Canary Islands, in addition, each island will form an organic category provided with an insular Council as a body.” manager of its peculiar interests, with administrative functions and powers equal to those assigned by law to the provinces.”

On the other hand, in the frustrated attempt to approve a Statute of Regional Autonomy in 1932, of which two drafts were written, there was discussion about what should be the best administrative and political framework for the Canary Islands, leading, on the part of sectors of the island of Tenerife, to an empowerment of the Island Councils as a primary element of the future region (Pérez and Alcaraz, 1996: 539). In the words of Gil Roldán, President of the Management Commission of Santa Cruz de Tenerife at that time, the principles that should be imposed in the future Canary Islands included: “the island, first; then, the region; and then, the mother nation” (extracted from Guimerá, 1976: 441). Again, it was evident the litigation struggle between Tenerife and Gran Canaria, the latter moving into positions of *status quo* transcript of the autonomy they possessed through the provincial division. At the partisan level, the main interpretations were two: the conservative one, which advocated fitting the region into the national structure

⁷ Already in 1910, the “peripheral” or minor islands brought to the Cortes a plebiscite project that incorporated the creation of Cabildos so that they were well represented (Pérez, 2004: 415). For more information on this topic, see (Millares, 1993)

⁸ *Strict sensu*, the name of said law was the following: “Law on Administrative Reorganization and Representation in the Courts of the Canary Islands.” It incorporated twelve articles, three Transitional Provisions and two additional articles.

⁹ It should be noted that the establishment of the Cabildos was not uniform for all the islands. For example, in Gran Canaria, Tenerife and La Palma were established in 1913, but El Hierro lacked a lobby until 1925.

in order to eliminate the “artificial provincial division” of the State; and the federal one, aimed at giving the Cabildos a leading role in autonomous development (Pérez and Alcaraz, 1996: 542).

Finally, the subsequent Franco dictatorship broke with the consensus established in the republican stage, establishing an administrative organization based on the principles of unity, uniformity and centralism. However, within this strict conformation, two exceptions are recognized: the Provincial Councils of Álava and Navarra where the provincial regimes are maintained; and the Canary Islands through the Island Councils and the Free Ports Regime (later called the Economic and Fiscal Regime) (Hernández Bravo, 2014: 789). Thus, the Island Councils would star in the Canarian political scene as they were purely insular institutions that did not break the authoritarian logic of the regime.

3. Governance in the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands since 1982

After the stage of democratic transition and from the EC of 1978 in Spain, a different model of political power was configured, characterized by the decentralization and political autonomy of the regions that made up the State. This model follows the logic of federal systems or *quasi-federal*, called in the Spanish case “State of Autonomies”¹⁰.

The entry into force of the EC in 1978 designed an “open” territorial organization, sending to the nationalities and regions the initiative of whether or not to access autonomy under the creation of Statutes that established it (Muñoz, 1980: 334). The logic underlying this model was the need to solve the entrenched Spanish territorial problem, derived from the demands of peripheral political movements (mainly the Basque, Catalan and Galician) that, in the pre- constitutional stage, had political autonomy as their objectives, self-determination or independence (Linz and Stepan, 1992).

Thus, the constitutional lack of definition regarding territorial organization made it possible for all territories that desired to achieve the maximum levels of autonomy according to the two routes that were provided for this. On the one hand, the route of art. 143 CE or *slow lane* by which those Autonomous Communities (CCAA) that wanted to take advantage of this route had to allow a period of five years to pass in order to expand the initial powers established in article 148.1 CE. On the other hand, the route of art. 151 EC or *Fast Track* which established the no need to let the five-year period elapse years of art. 143 CE, in order to assume all the powers of art. 149.1 EC. In this way, the Autonomous State was configured based on the differences in the access routes to self-government, with maximum autonomies (Galicia, Basque Country, Catalonia and Andalusia) and common regime autonomies. However, given that the EC does not exempt the CCAA of the common regime from reaching the maximum level of competence, alternative ways were quickly established to achieve it. Navarra, Valencia and the Canary Islands, after the elaboration of certain transfer laws, were able to be equivalent in terms of competence to the previous four, although with restrictions, such as the power of early dissolution of their respective regional parliaments and the calling of regional elections (Romero, 2102: 17).

In the Canary Islands, the autonomous issue was not free of problems from the first moment that the pre-autonomous regime was established, under Royal Decree- Law 9/1978¹¹. The two main political parties, UCD and PSOE, took the reins of the debates on the elaboration of autonomy, once again discussing the historical problems of the archipelago. On the one hand, the question arose of the position that the Island Councils should have in the new regional institutional framework and, on the other, how to address the aspects derived from insularity and the balances between smaller and larger islands and between the two largest ones. each other (García, 2008: 264). The difficulty involved in the elaboration of provisional autonomy and, later, full autonomy, is evidenced by Clavero Arévalo himself, then Minister for the Regions, when he expressed that: “the rivalry between Las Palmas and Santa Cruz de Tenerife in order of the capital, and even the origin of the president of the Canary Islands, the fears of the councils of each island of being absorbed by the Junta de Canarias, the number of representatives of the smaller islands in relation to those of the larger ones in the regional body, the replacement of the Interprovincial Board of the Canary Islands by the new pre-autonomous entity, the modification of the special tax regime of the Canary Islands to adapt it to the new situation and to financing the Junta de Canarias and the creation of a solidarity fund that would serve to correct inter-island economic and social imbalances, constituted very serious difficulties” (Clavero, 1983:64).

After several years of serious negotiations for the institutional organization of the archipelago, the EACan is approved through Organic Law 10/1982, of August 10. However, and before its approval, it was the *Medinaceli pact* of April 29, 1982, which made it possible to reach a consensus on the most important issues of the statutory text, such as the capital status of the future community and the headquarters (Parliament, Government, Superior Court of Justice, Delegation of the Government...), as well as the configuration of the electoral system.

¹⁰ The EC does not define any specific model, being the legal doctrine that defines it as “Autonomous State” or “State of the Autonomies” (Carballo, 2010: 61).

¹¹ The pre-autonomous regimes were established thanks to the Catalan demands to reestablish the autonomy they had in 1932. To this end, the President of the Government Adolfo Suárez negotiated with Josep Tarradellas, President of the Generalitat in exile, a legal-institutional framework of pension autonomy until the CE was approved. This window of opportunity was taken advantage of by the other regions to aspire to decentralization and political autonomy.

The Island Councils were also the subject of discussion and questioned, given that it was unknown to what extent a new institutional organization would render such entities ineffective. It would be the same lobby presidents who pressured to maintain political and financial autonomy, in addition to having governing and representative bodies for each island (Pérez, 2004: 429).

As it could not be otherwise, the EACan of 1982 contains several precepts on the conception of the island. In his art. 8 establishes that the islands are configured as elements of the territorial organization of the Autonomous Community, and that the powers established in the Statute itself, as well as those indicated in the successive laws of the Parliament of the Canary Islands, will be exercised by the Island Councils. In the same way, art. 23 EACan indicates that the organization and operation of the Cabildos will be carried out under a Law approved by an absolute majority of the Parliament of the Canary Islands within the framework of the EC. To this end, the 1978 EC in its art. 141.4 establishes that "in the Archipelagos, the Islands will also have their own Administration in the form of Cabildos or Councils."

Thus, what emerges from the basic legislation that regulates the Island Councils is that these are, simultaneously, bodies of government, administration and representation of the islands, and institutions of the Autonomous Community (art. 5 of Law 8/ 2015, of April 1, of island councils). This legal concept of character *two-faced* has been paradoxical at a comparative level, leading to doctrinal debate to what extent they fit into one or another legal regime, or if, on the contrary, they have a different legal nature (Suay, 2006). Despite everything, the truth is that the Island Councils have only a single autonomy, which, as Hernández Bravo (2014: 792) says, should be distinguished from other different ones. The island entities enjoy the *administrative autonomy* for the exercise of its powers and to fulfill the purposes that the EC grants to City Councils, local Corporations and local Administration; but they don't keep the *political autonomy*, that which is qualified to legislate. In this regard, the Advisory Council of the Canary Islands in its Opinion No. 1/1985, of October 31, has stated that, although the Island Councils may be considered autonomous institutions, in no case are they self-government institutions of the Autonomous Community (Suay, 2006: 171). To this end, the Advisory Council defines them as "statutory contributors to the pursuit of its goals," that is, institutions that tend to help better manage the affairs of the Canary Islands community (Sarmiento, 2003: 1090).

In political practice the characteristic of contributors is not clearly reflected. Let us think in this regard that the most important political discussions throughout the contemporary history of the Canary Islands have come as a result of the location of the island as the main element of the archipelago, with the Cabildo being used as a tool to empower the insular vision (Fernández Es-quer, 2016). As previously expressed, from the first moment of Canarian autonomy the debate was based on the logic of whether the Island Councils should be left as pivotal institutions or, on the contrary, the Autonomous Community should be the frame of reference. In the end, it was decided to place the Island Councils in an intermediate position, being, thanks to the EC, a local administration governed by state laws and, at the same time, a regional administration under the EACan and the regional laws. This characterization left the Autonomous Community as a common or supra-insular institution that had to exercise control and management of matters that concern all citizens of the region. In contrast, the Island Council would exercise its position as a political body focused on the affairs of its own island without undermining regional action.

This balance or counterweight has been altered by the projection of the canary *problem* and partisan dynamics. Autonomous governance has been characterized by the prominence of the insular over the regional. And it is not strange if we look at the configuration of the archipelago that, in essence, makes it possible for autonomy to be emptied through different methods.

Firstly, the Canarian electoral system, until the EACan reform of 2018, exclusively established the island as an electoral district, completely ignoring the autonomous area¹². This fact comes from the pressure exerted by the islandist political forces (primarily from the smaller islands), who understand that the safeguarding of their interests comes from empowering the island against regional centralism, always, and according to them, beneficial for the capital islands (Hernández Bravo, 2016: 131 ff.).

Secondly, the political parties of the Canary Islands, whether they are at the state level (PSC-PSOE or PP) or regional (CC or NC), direct their *issues* (electoral issues) to the inhabitants of each island, leaving the autonomous level in the background (Báez, 2012). This is why the island becomes relevant in the development of public policies and, in turn, influences the assessment that the Canarian citizen establishes to measure his priorities.

The third element is reflected in the island institutions. As we have expressed, the Island Councils, as they possess the powers of the Autonomous Community itself, need the economic means to carry them out. On many occasions, the transfers or delegations made by the Autonomous Community to the island administrations are not linked to their financial structure, allowing conflicts between Councils and the autonomous Government. On many occasions the island representatives have accused the regional government of getting rid of its responsibilities by delegating or transferring powers to the Councils. This issue is aggravated if political representatives of different parties govern in both administrations, since tension increases and institutional blockages become noticeable. The Island Councils, which have recognized knowing their representation in the Parliament of the Canary Islands through the General Commission of Island Councils, they periodically send through their presidents the issues that they believe should be addressed by the autonomous Government. However, in reality the demands are attended to through informal procedures between representatives of the administrations, in which they

¹² The EACan reform of 2018 has established a regional constituency that coexists with the seven island constituencies. For an in-depth analysis of this topic, see (Pérez and Mujica, 2016).

have been accused of obscurantism and clientelism¹³.

It seems, therefore, that the head-on clash between the regional and island executives could generate burdensome scenarios for citizens, who would not know to what extent to grant responsibilities to the administrations responsible for managing and solving public affairs. To this extent, the *responsiveness*, that is, the adjustment of politicians' decisions to the preferences of citizens, is affected by the couplings of these two institutions where it is unclear what services each offers and, ultimately, to whom the services are granted. management achievements and failures.

3.1 Some indicators on governance in the Canary Islands

Consequently, this monopolization of the *island sand maintains* components that affect autonomous governance. Now, in no way do I want to categorize that there is a causal effect between insularism and bad governance, but rather that insularity is another variable that affects the governability of the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands. However, there is different data that bring us closer to understanding how the region works and what relationship it maintains with the insular *fact*.

A first contact with the autonomous governance of the Canary Islands is offered by the 2017 European Quality Index of Regional Governments prepared by the University of Gothenburg. It analyzes 221 EU regions, with a total of 77,966 respondents¹⁴. Indicators are used such as the perception of corruption, the quality and impartiality of public sector institutions and services.

Well, among all the Spanish regions, the Canary Islands occupies the penultimate position in quality of its governance with -0.709, reflecting the poor quality of governance in the community and the pessimism that Canarian citizens have towards it.

Another relevant piece of information is that which emerges from the 2018 Dependency Observatory Opinion, which evaluates how the Dependency Law is applied in the Autonomous Communities¹⁵. Thus, the Canarian community occupies the last place with 1.8 points out of 10. A priori, it can be considered that this terrible position does not arise as a result of the insular territorial organization, but if the powers transferred in Law 8/2015, of April 1, on island councils, through its art. 6.2.i) the Island Councils are assigned jurisdiction in the field of "social assistance and social services." "Dependency management in the terms provided by law." Once again, we must suggest that it is pretentious to attribute full responsibility on this issue to the island entities, but this does not mean that they should be exempted from an obvious correlation.

Finally, an important issue must be addressed for fragmented territories such as the Canary Islands: territorial planning, that is, the will, practice and public action of territorial intervention and protection over said organization (territory government policy) (Hernández *et al.* . 2010). The current legal framework of the Canary Islands on this issue is included in Law 4/2017 of July 13, on Land and Protected Natural Spaces of the Canary Islands, in which the approval of the island councils' plans is attributed to the Plenary Sessions of the Island Councils. management, of the natural resources and of the territory of the islands within the framework, where appropriate, of the management guidelines. What emerges from this fact is the will of the autonomous legislator to plan the Canarian territory of *bottom* , in the same way, from the island to the region. There are considerable Canarian civil society organizations that have criticized this policy of the regional executive, alleging that the legislation opens the ban on urban speculation as there is no control over the action of the Island Councils (Pérez, 2018). In the same way, this territorial conception distances the Canary Islands from having a homogenized territorial model, encouraging differentiation between islands.

Thus, we could continue listing factors that influence the future of governance in the Canary Islands in line with the problem *island-region*. Issues such as infrastructure, health service, transportation, employment, etc. would require a more exhaustive analysis than can be offered here.

4. Hypothesis

Next, I will present the hypotheses that I intend to validate according to the main theoretical arguments presented above.

Hypothesis 1: "Canarian society maintains difficulty when assigning responsibilities to its institutions, mainly between the Government of the Canary Islands and the Island Councils."

Hypothesis 2: "It is expected that the Island Councils will have a better evaluation in the non-capital islands, as a result of the prominence that the island entities present in the management and execution of the services of the Autonomous Community."

Hypothesis 3: "There is greater importance on the part of Canarian public opinion toward *selectoral arena* "island rather than autonomous."

¹³ This was the reason why, in December 2017, the regional government pact was broken between CC and PSC-PSOE. The socialist party accused CC, the party of the regional president, of exercising clientelism when transferring the Canary Islands Development Funds (Fdcan) between the Island Councils. The main argument revolved around favoring the Island Councils and City Councils where CC governed.

¹⁴For more information, see: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/es/information/maps/quality_of_governance

¹⁵ See: <https://www.directoressociales.com/documentos/dictamenesobservatorio.html>.

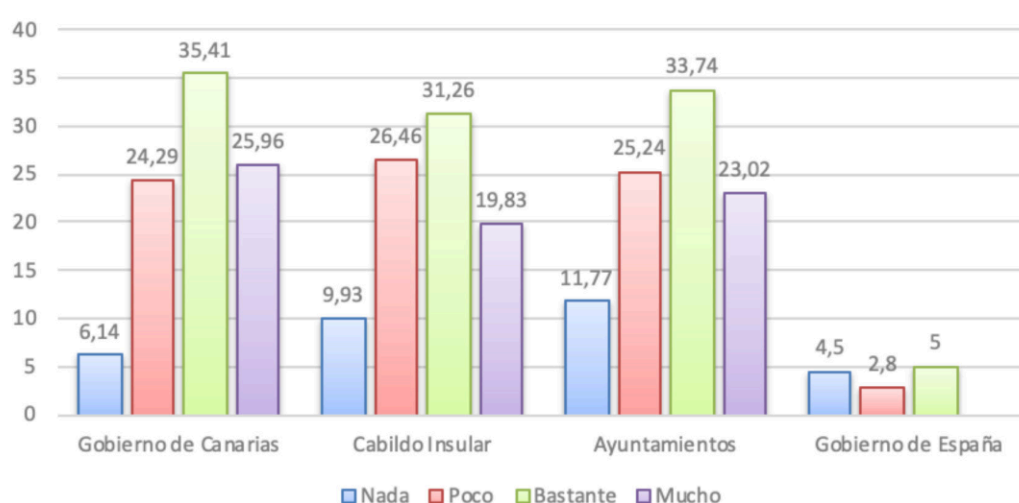
5. Hypothesis

Next, the aim is to reflect and analyze the opinions that the citizens of the Canary Islands have towards their Public Administrations. It seeks to demonstrate whether Canarian society maintains any difficulties when assigning responsibilities to its institutions, mainly, between the Government of the Canary Islands and the Island Councils. To do this, the 2018 Socioeconomic Habits and Confidence/Public Administration and Citizen Participation Survey carried out by the Canarian Institute of Statistics (ISTAC) will be used.

Graph 1 corresponds to the degree of importance given by Canarian citizens to public services depending on the type of administration. Firstly, it appears that there is a similar comparison between the regional, insular and municipal administrations regarding assessments of “quite a bit” and “a lot” of importance.

Thus, for the Canarian citizen, the Government of the Canary Islands has “quite” importance in the provision of services (35.41%), followed by the City Councils (33.74%) and the Island Councils (31.26%). On the contrary, the Government of Spain does not present importance to public opinion in the provision of services.

Graph 1. Degree of importance given to public services according to type of Administration.



Source: Own elaboration based on ISTAC data (2018).

For its part, graph 2 indicates some data to take into account. Firstly, in general, Canarian public opinion presents negative evaluations towards the operation of public services, to a greater extent, between the regional administration (42.89%) and the state administration (41.58%). The Island Councils and the City Councils also obtain “unsatisfactory” ratings, 38.49% and 38.19% respectively. Among the optimistic assessments are the Government of the Canary Islands (32.12%) and the City Councils (32.01). Thus, these data are aligned with those offered in graph 1, since it is the regional and municipal public administrations that are most important to the citizen in the provision of services and, in turn, those that are best valued.

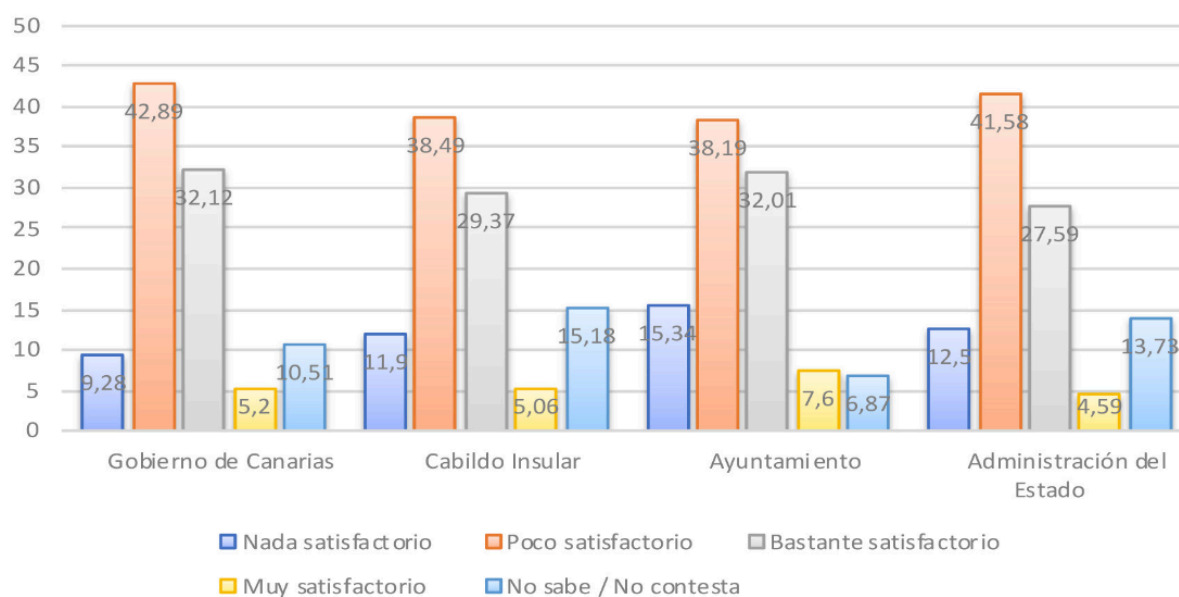
It is interesting to analyze whether there are substantial differences in the valuation of public services by type of administration among the population of the different islands. Given the insularization in the political and institutional configuration of the Canary Islands, we can consider that the *cleavage capital* islands-non-capital islands would mean that among the latter there would be greater dissatisfaction with the autonomous government. It should be taken into account in this regard that the Canarian autonomous administration is concentrated symmetrically between the capital islands but, on the contrary, the peripheral islands lack the main seats of regional government (Hernández, 2004). Thus, it is expected that the Island Councils will have a better evaluation in the non-capital islands as a result of the prominence that the island entities present in the management and execution of the services of the Autonomous Community.

Graph 3 attempts to resolve the previous hypothesis by reflecting the degree of valuation of public services according to type of administration and depending on the island. From the data it is clear that there are no substantial differences in the assessment of the Island Councils and the Autonomous Government in reference to the services provided. There is a certain consensus in practically all of the islands of the archipelago that the provision of public services by the regional and island entity is considered “unsatisfactory”. Perhaps the most striking fact is the 49.21% of the inhabitants of La Gomera who value the Island Council positively, possibly due to the influence and prominence that its president Casimiro Curbelo has exercised since 1991.

Finally, this analysis will conclude with the importance of electoral processes in the Canary Islands. To do this, we must remember the configuration that the electoral regulatory framework has given to the island as *electoral arena* own (García, 2016). First, the art. 69.3 of the EC establishes that, in the island provinces, each island or group of them will constitute an electoral district with the following distribution for the elections to the Senate: three senators for each of the largest islands (Gran Canaria, Tenerife and Mallorca), and one for the remaining islands or island groups of Ibiza-Formentera, Menorca, Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, La Gomera, El Hierro and La Palma. For its part, the recent EAC in its art. 39.2.c. establishes that the electoral constituencies may be autonomous, island or both, and that each of the islands constitutes its own electoral constituency.

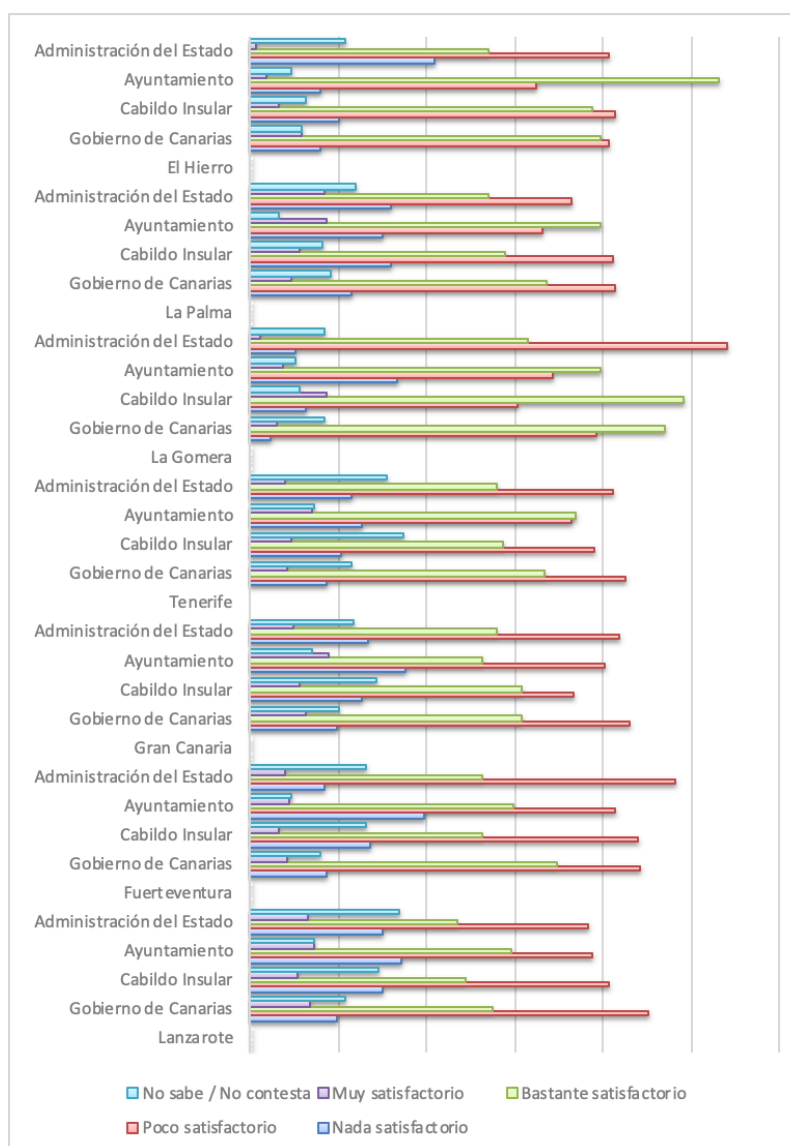
Before the 2018 reform, the EAC only considered electoral constituency to the island, the autonomous area being forgotten. This configuration has generated that the Canarian party system is characterized by insularity and electoral fragmentation.

Graph 2. Assessment of the functioning of public services according to type of administration.



Source: Own elaboration based on ISTAC data (2018).

Graph 3. Valuation of public services according to type of administration and depending on the island.



Source: Own elaboration based on ISTAC data (2018).

For the particular case of the Island Councils, their electoral regulation is specifically established in Title IV of the LOREG “*special provisions for the election of the Canary Island Councils*”, specifically, in art. 201. The candidacies are established in closed and blocked lists, following the D'Hondt formula for the attribution of councilors and with an electoral exclusion barrier of 5%. The election of its members is direct, so that it substantially deviates from the configuration established for the Provincial Councils or the Island Councils of the Balearic Islands. The constituency is the island, and the president of the Island Council will be number one on the most voted list. That is to say, the regulation offers the Island Councils a kind of presidentialization by giving direct prominence to the main candidates of each political formation, establishing an electoral competition where personalisms and island issues prevail to a greater extent than those of a regional scope. What's more, island media focus on information from their own island, providing the public with informative shortcuts about what is the relevant political and social space. For this reason, different authors have classified the island elections as an electoral *arena* own (García, 2016).

To corroborate whether there is a greater preeminence towards *electoral arena* island than to the regional or regional elections, below we will analyze the data from the Canary Islands Opinion Barometer of 2010. As seen in graph 4, the Canarian society attributes greater importance to the regional elections over the island and municipal elections (41.7 %, 9.3% and 28.1% respectively). Thus, between these last two electoral arenas there is a considerable difference, since lobby elections are relegated to a meager percentage of 9.3%. It seems, therefore, that the Canarian society deserves greater relevance at the

autonomous level than at the island level, a revealing fact if we understand the political and institutional dynamics that have been exercised in the Canary Islands.

6. Conclusions

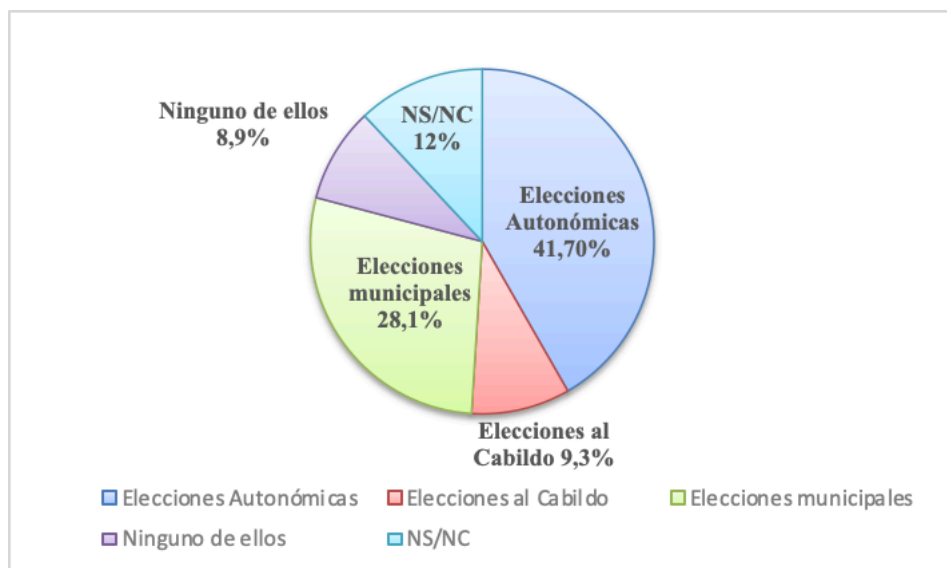
This work has attempted to reflect the existing problems in the Canary archipelago through its peculiar political-institutional organization. The fragmented and insular character has meant that, immediately after its incorporation into the Kingdom of Castile, forms of government were established in the Canary Islands where the island takes on absolute relevance. The Island Councils, as bodies of government and insular administration, have starred in the political life of the islands both in their facets as the highest insular bodies, and in being pivotal elements of the regional institutional composition. This is the main question that this study attempts to address: the capacity of the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands to converge the regional sphere with the insular sphere without undermining either part.

Thus, it has been proposed that the Island

Councils have had two positions. On the one hand, and initially, they were tools to try to address the entrenchment *canary problem*, therefore, the constant confrontation between the two largest islands (Gran Canaria and Tenerife) and the composition of the archipelago as a region based on the empowerment of the islands themselves. On the other hand, in the democratic stage that began in 1978, they have acted as true protagonists in the political action of the Autonomous Community, becoming at certain times institutions with great power of influence in the development and distribution of public services. Thus, the legislative framework, both state and regional, gives the island entities a legal duality as they are local and regional institutions at the same time.

However, this study has confirmed that island institutions are relegated to minimal responsibility, as reflected in the little relevance of the "island electoral arena" compared to the regional and municipal ones. This fact is opposed to the widespread theory of island monopolization of the preferences and interests of the citizens of the Canary Islands.

Graph 4. Importance of electoral processes in the Canary Islands.



Fountain: Own elaboration based on the Canary Islands Opinion Barometer (June 2010).

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