



# Las plataformas de participación ciudadana en las capitales de las comunidades autónomas

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**ES Resumen.** Este artículo aborda el análisis de las plataformas de participación ciudadana de aquellas 18 capitales de las comunidades autónomas que tienen estos espacios. Para ello, se identifica qué municipios tienen plataformas y qué tipos y, se estudia si hay algún factor de contexto que lo pueda justificar. Para llevarlo a cabo, se analiza las plataformas digitales y se complementa con revisión de referencias en participación ciudadana. Los resultados obtenidos demuestran que el sistema de democracia digital en España no ha tenido la misma incidencia en todas las capitales de las comunidades autónomas.

**Palabras clave:** Plataformas; democracia digital; ciudadanía; administración pública; comunidades autónomas.

## **EN Citizen participation platforms in the capitals of autonomous communities**

**EN Abstract.** This article analyzes the citizen participation platforms of the 18 capitals of the autonomous communities that have these spaces. To do so, it identifies which municipalities have platforms and what types of platforms, and studies whether there is any contextual factor that may justify it. To carry it out, the digital platforms are analyzed and complemented with a review of references in citizen participation. The results obtained show that the digital democracy system in Spain has not had the same incidence in all the capitals of the autonomous communities.

**Keywords:** Platforms; digital democracy; citizenship; public administration; autonomous communities.

**Summary:** 1. Introduction. Methodology. 3. Results. 3.1. Citizen participation platform. 3.2. Year of creation. 3.3. Number of participatory processes. 3.4. Political party. 3.5. Number of inhabitants. 4. Discussion. 4.1. Citizen participation platform. 4.2. Year of creation. 4.3. Number of participatory processes. 4.4. Political party. 4.5. Number of inhabitants. 5. Conclusion. Documentary sources.

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## 1. Introduction

New technologies have changed the way citizens relate to the public administration. Society is becoming increasingly digitized and, surely, it would not be understood that the public sector will remain on the sidelines (and, therefore, isolated) of this situation. Although at the end of the twentieth century many public entities began to digitize by opening their websites, it was not until the economic, political and social crisis of 2008 that it became clear that it was necessary for public administrations to have digital spaces beyond their websites.

Citizens, with movements such as 15M in Spain, demanded a 360-degree change that could be summarized in two elements: transparency and participation. And the way to do this was to create and develop electronic offices and citizen participation platforms. This phenomenon of putting the technology of public administration at the service of citizens, in order to improve the rights and freedoms of individuals and promote the processes of modernization and innovation of public entities, is known as digital democracy (Ford, 2019: 131).

With the arrival of the crisis, the citizenry did not settle for being a passive subject of public decisions, but wished to be an active actor. In practice, giving voice to the citizenry means giving the opportunity to improve public services and policies (Borge, Balcells, Padró-Solanet, Batlle, Orte and Serra, 2018: 30) but it also serves to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. Or, in other words, the needed citizen participation and needs to be a reality.

The barrier encountered by the public sector in 2008, and which is still to some extent present, is that there is no shared definition of what is and is not citizen participation. By way of example, for Cammaerts and Carpentier (2004) the key to citizen participation lies in the commitment of the people and organizations to influence the public environment. This definition would be very broad because it includes any act of participation: volunteering, participatory processes, entities, lobbies, parties. On the other hand, for Cernadas, Ramos and Pineda (2016: 164) participation has to be understood from four perspectives: participation as a mechanism to manage problems, participation as a space for dialogue, participation does not eliminate representative democracy (but rather complements it) and citizen participation as a new culture of doing politics. While for Tapella (2021:4) citizen participation is possible as long as two aspects are fulfilled: the opportunities to participate (marked by institutional and political will) and the real capacity of citizens to participate. For this article, citizen participation is considered to be a way of doing politics where citizens make decisions, either by voting (direct democracy) or by speaking (deliberative democracy) beyond elections, with the aim of improving public policies and reducing the decision-making power of representatives.

In 2008, new technologies were becoming increasingly important in the day-to-day life of citizens. And, of course, citizen participation could not be left out of this technological context. In fact, new technologies become the great salvation of citizen participation, and, in a way, of democracy itself (Morozov, 2013). Although it is also true that the opposite may occur. New technologies may be creating two types of citizens: those who have access to the Internet and therefore have rights, and those who are excluded from the digital world and therefore do not have rights. Even Caballero (2021:92) goes a step further, pointing out that it is possible to create AIs that learn and reason like people. It is clear that until before the creation of ChatGPT (in 2022), it might have been science-fiction, but it is already a reality.

What is clear is that the Internet has undoubtedly been a breakthrough in terms of communication and interaction with citizens, quickly and with greater transparency. These new ways of online relationship allow reaching collectives that would surely not participate in a face-to-face manner, such as people living in areas far from the center, where face-to-face activities take place, (Borge, Balcells, Padró-Solanet, Batlle, Orte, & Serra, 2018: 30) and, additionally, increases the possibilities of collaboration and co-production (Macintosh, 2003; Linders, 2012). In other words, public administrations have had to explore new forms of communication in order to reach citizens (Climent and Toscano, 2024: 2).

There are public administrations that choose to channel citizen participation through a channel of their own in order to demonstrate the importance of the people's involvement in public decision-making. And this is precisely how citizen participation platforms are being created, linking the world of social sciences (especially political sciences) and technology.

Citizen participation platforms have had more impact at the municipal level. The reasons may be justified because the city councils, which are the administration closest to the citizens, are where participation was born (although it did happen many years ago with the *poleis*) and at present it is where more experiences of citizen participation are carried out.

In Spain, the first citizen participation platform to be created is Cónsul, in the Madrid City Council in 2015. And, little by little, other municipalities join this initiative. The first city council to join is Barcelona, with the creation of the platform Decidim.

It is clear that Cónsul and Decidim are citizen participation platforms to the extent that both associations identify themselves as such and propose a totally different software to the municipal website where any public entity, if it so wishes, can have its own digital space. However, what happens in the municipalities' own platforms (beyond Cónsul and Decidim)? In other words, where is the boundary between the citizen participation web site where citizens can interact and a platform for citizen participation? At the moment, it is clear that when there is a Google form on the web it refers to the municipal website itself, but when there is a developed structure of participation in the digital space the line between being part of the web or being a platform is not clear. Surely the first element is that the municipality itself identifies the digital space as a platform. However, the great dilemma is that there is no consensus on the necessary requirements to be a platform for citizen participation. For this paper, the platform is considered as a space that has the purpose of providing constant dialogue (Crespo, 2019: 101) and/or voting on the different options and favoring transparency in public decision-making.

The objective of this work is to analyze the citizen participation platforms of the 18 capitals of the autonomous communities, in order to identify which and how many municipalities have these digital spaces and if there is any contextual factor that can explain why in some municipalities have a greater participation than others. To carry out

this analysis, the type and year of creation of the platform, the number of participatory processes, the number of inhabitants and the party or parties that have governed in the capitals since the platform was launched in the municipality are studied.

This research has two main hypotheses that have accompanied the entire investigation. On one hand, as shown by studies such as Font and Blanco (2004), left-wing parties are more in favor of opening and developing mechanisms for citizen participation than right-wing parties, and it is expected that this situation will also be the case in this research. On the other hand, municipalities that have had a citizen participation platform for a longer period of time have more participatory processes.

This work proposes a new way of looking at the world of citizen participation, with its main focus being participation platforms. There are already works on the use of Decidim (such as Barandiaran, Calleja, Monterde, Aragón, Linares-Lanzman, Romero, and Pereira, 2017) and Consul (such as Rojo, Pina, García-Rayado, 2020) platforms, in fact this research uses them as reference. Now what about municipalities that go beyond the Decidim and Consul platforms? This is an area where there is a lack of research and, precisely, this work includes the capitals of the communities that have a citizen participation platform, whether or not they have a Decidim and/or Consul platform.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research question, hypothesis and study variables

In this paper we ask ourselves the reasons that lead to the creation of a citizen participation platform, with the hypothesis that left-wing formations are more in favor of implementing public policies in favor of citizen participation. To this end, the extent to which any of the following four context dimensions can justify the possible creation and development of platforms is studied. These indicators are: specific year of creation; number of participatory processes; political party that existed at the time the platform was created and the different formations there have been; and number of inhabitants.

First, there is the specific year of creation of the digital space. In 2008, apart from the economic crisis as a result of the bursting from the real estate bubble, there was a social and political crisis in which many citizens mobilized to change the representative democracy that had existed so far, in order to move towards a model where citizen participation had to be key when making public decisions. And, precisely, identifying the year in which the platform was created is a way of identifying when this impact took place. It should not be forgotten that in Spain, although citizen participation methodologies have been introduced, there is still a system where representative democracy is the dominant one.

Secondly, the number of participatory processes is a way of evaluating whether citizen participation has really been sustained over time and has not been a one-off event. In other words, whether the participation policies have really been maintained over time or, on the contrary, have not been so. The way to measure this is to identify how many participatory processes have been carried out by the cities under study.

Thirdly, we will study the political parties or groups of voters that governed when the participation platform was created and the political parties that have existed up to the 2019-2023 legislature. It is considered that left-wing formations are those that are more open to diversity, more in favor of change and state intervention in the economy, while right-wing parties are associated with free competition, free market and conservatism. As mentioned above, there are studies that show that left-wing parties are more supportive of citizen participation than right-wing parties. This indicator identifies whether this theory is applicable to these case studies.

Fourth, the number of inhabitants. The 18 cities studied have different numbers of inhabitants; there are large cities (such as Madrid and Barcelona) and others that have fewer (such as Logroño). This indicator identifies whether or not there is a relationship between having or not a citizen participation platform and the number of inhabitants.

### 2.2. Spatial and temporal framework

This research includes the study of citizen participation platforms, in the event that there is, of the 18 capitals of the autonomous communities (actually there are 17 autonomous communities, but in the case of the Canary Islands there is a double capital). This makes our sample selection include the following municipalities: Zaragoza, Oviedo, Palma, Vitoria, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Santander, Toledo, Valladolid, Barcelona, Mérida, Santiago de Compostela, Madrid, Murcia, Logroño and Valencia. Generally speaking, these municipalities have very different social and political characteristics, but they share a common element that is the reason these 18 cities were chosen and not others: they are capital cities.

The first citizen participation platform arrived in Spain in 2015 with Cónsul, in the Madrid City Council. In the municipal elections of 2015, although the result gives the victory to the Popular Party, Manuela Carmena of the formation Ahora Madrid, makes a pact with the socialists and manages to govern in minority. One of the projects that both Ahora Madrid and the socialists carry in their electoral programs is that a digital space must be created to incorporate the voice of the citizens, and this is precisely what is done with the platform Cónsul Madrid, currently under the name of Decide Madrid.

The next city to incorporate the platforms was Barcelona with Decidim. Ada Colau, with the formation of Barcelona en Comú, won the local elections of 2015 and managed to make a pact with the socialists to govern jointly. As in the case of Madrid, both left-wing formations in their electoral programs already incorporated the need to create a digital citizen participation tool.

Both Consul and Decidim have been spreading both nationally and internationally. As an example, according to the Decidim.org website, as of 3rd of July, 2024, there are 30 countries, 240 institutions and 150 organizations using it. And other platforms have even been developed for a given public administration to gather the opinion of citizens for a given public policy. By way of example, the Zaragoza City Council identifies the space for citizen participation

as the Idea Zaragoza platform.

Having a citizen participation platform helps in making all the work that has been done, is being done and will be done in this visible area. For practical purposes, citizen participation implies that representatives lose responsibility (and, to some extent, power) to delegate it to citizens (Carmona, 2016).

All the quantitative data needed for this research has been found in the different websites and digital platforms of the municipalities, with the exception of the number of inhabitants, for which the latest study of registered people of the INE (National Institute of Statistics) dating from 2021 was selected in order to avoid data diversity.

To minimize data collection errors, for example, the number of participatory processes may change from one day to another. All the indicators collected are dated 2023, with the exception of the party that does not include the legislature after the May 2023 elections and the number of inhabitants, which is taken from the last survey of registered people in 2021.

### 3. Results

The results have been organized according to the five items studied in this article: type of platform; year of creation; number of participatory processes; formation or formations that governed at the time the digital platform was implemented and in subsequent years; and number of inhabitants.

#### 3.1. Platform

The main variable that supports all the indicators of this research is to identify which municipalities have citizen participation platforms and which do not. The analysis of this variable can be done from two perspectives: the restrictive one (where only cases that use Decidim and Consul are included) and the broad one (which considers that a platform is a space where participants can debate and/or vote and be transparent about the decisions that are made).

Firstly, from the restrictive perspective, as can be seen in Figure 1, 55.6 % of the capital cities have a citizen participation platform. In other words, out of all the cities under study in this research, 3 have Decidim and 7 have Consul, while 8 do not have a participation platform. More specifically, Barcelona, Murcia and Pamplona are the cities that have Decidim, while Oviedo, Palma, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Madrid, Valencia and Toledo use Consul.

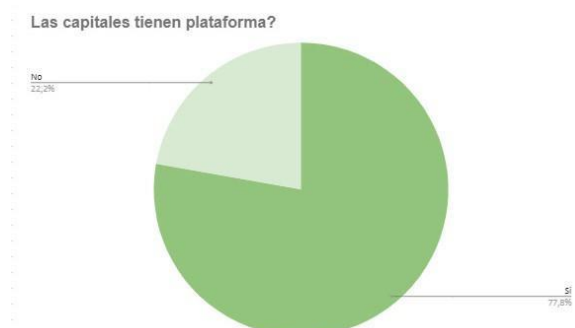
Graph 1. Percentage of CAAC capitals that use the Consul or Decidim platforms.



Source: Own elaboration based on data from citizen participation platforms.

Secondly, from a broader perspective, the vast majority of cities have citizen participation platforms, specifically 77.8 % of the capital cities have platforms, or in other words, 14 out of the 18 municipalities studied in this article have them. Specifically, in addition to the cities that have Decidim and Cònsul, we must add Seville with Iniciativa Sevilla Abierta, Zaragoza with Idea Zaragoza, Logroño with Logroño Participa and Santiago de Compostela with Decide Santiago de Compostela.

Graph 2. Do capitals have platforms?



Source: Owned elaboration based on data from citizen participation platforms.

It should be mentioned that Oviedo and Valencia are two special case studies. These two cities have more than one participation channel. In the case of Oviedo, there are three channels: Oviedo Decide which has the Consul software and the city council only uses it for satisfaction surveys; Oviedo Participa which is a space for transparency of all decisions made from citizen participation; and Consulta Oviedo, which is used for all citizen participation

experiences beyond surveys. Secondly, Valencia is less complex than Oviedo. The Valencia City Council works with spaces for participation, the Decidim Valencia (based in Cónsul) which is used to carry out participatory budgets and the municipal website where all other participatory processes are carried out.

The cities that do not have a platform are Santander, Mérida, Valladolid and Vitoria. First of all, Santander has a web space called Santander City Brain which, according to information found on the main website, is the space where citizens can participate to make decisions together. However, this digital space does not work since the space cannot be accessed due to IT issues and, from the information available, it is not possible to conclude if it is really a continuation of the website or if it is a citizen participation platform of its own. In the cases of Mérida, Valladolid and Vitoria, the respective municipalities do not identify the citizen participation spaces as a platform. They are spaces for transparency of what the respective city councils are doing and not for interaction with the citizens.

In order to avoid possible gaps in this research, cities that either have duplicity of participation channels or cannot be clearly identified as having citizen participation platforms, are left out of the study of the remaining variables. The reasons are clear: either they cannot be known because they are not sufficiently transparent with citizens, or they do not homogenize the participation channels, a situation that can lead to citizens not knowing where to go, which can end up being counterproductive: citizens decide not to participate.

### 3.2. Year of creation

The citizen participation platform is not born at the same time in every capital city. As shown in the following table, 2017 is the year in which more cities decide to incorporate citizen participation platforms, specifically 7 of the 12 capitals that are studied in more detail.

Table 1. Year of creation of citizen participation platforms.

Capital city of the CCAA <sup>1</sup>	Year of creation
Madrid	2015
Barcelona	2016
Pamplona	2017
Santiago de Compostela	2017
Sevilla	2017
Palma	2017
Santa Cruz de Tenerife	2017
Las Palmas de Gran Canaria	2017
Toledo	2017
Logroño	2018
Zaragoza	2021
Murcia	2022

Source: Owned elaboration based on data from citizen participation platforms.

### 3.3. Number of participatory processes

From the moment in which the citizen participation platform was created, in the respective cities, until the 31st of December, 2023 (when the year of the last electoral mandate ends, this date is chosen in order to avoid the possible variation of the data depending on the day of the current legislature), not all citizen participation platforms have the same number of participatory processes. Barcelona is the city that has carried out the most processes, with 103, while Murcia is the one with the least, with only 1 experience.

Table 2. Number of participatory processes.

City	Number of processes
Barcelona	103
Madrid	86
Zaragoza	46
Palma	37
Santa Cruz de Tenerife	35
Las Palmas de Gran Canaria	16
Pamplona	11
Toledo	6
Logroño	4
Murcia	1
Sevilla	The information is not available
Santiago de Compostela	The information is not available

<sup>1</sup> NT: The Spanish acronym "CCAA" means Autonomous Communities.



Source: owned elaboration based on data from citizen participation platforms.

The cases of Sevilla and Santiago de Compostela are special. They are the only platforms where the city council does not make public the number of participatory processes. Undoubtedly this situation is a deficit that this consistory has with transparency. We did not want to go deeper into possible interviews precisely to point out this lack of accountability from the city councils of Sevilla and Santiago de Compostela.

### 3.4. Political Party

The vast majority of platforms in the capitals of the autonomous communities were created between the 2016-2019 electoral term, with the exception of Zaragoza and Murcia, which were created in the following legislature (2019-2023).

In the 2016-2019 term, nine municipalities created their citizen participation platform. Of these cities, seven (Sevilla, Palma, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Toledo, Barcelona, Santiago de Compostela, Madrid and Pamplona) were governed by left-wing parties<sup>2</sup>, while only Logroño and Santa Cruz de Tenerife were in the hands of right-wing parties.

In the following legislature, 2019-2023, the context was slightly different. Most of the cities that gave continuity to the platform were still in the hands of left-wing parties (all the capitals, except Madrid, Santa Cruz de Tenerife and Pamplona). However, the municipalities that joined the citizen participation platforms, Zaragoza and Murcia, were governed by right-wing parties.

Table 3. Who governed?

	Who governed in 2015-2019?	Who governed in 2019-2023?
Sevilla	PSOE	PSOE
Zaragoza		PP-Ciudadanos
Palma	PSOE-Podemos	PSOE-Podemos
Santa Cruz de Tenerife	Ciudadanos-PP	PSOE Canary Islands-PP Coalition
Las Palmas de Gran Canaria	PSOE- Nueva Canarias-Podemos	PSOE- Nueva Canarias-Podemos
Toledo	PSOE-CLM Ganemos Toledo	PSOE
Barcelona	Podemos	Podemos-PSOE
Santiago de Compostela	Compostela Abierta	PSOE
Madrid	Podemos-PSOE	PP-Ciudadanos
Murcia		PP-Ciudadanos
Pamplona	EH Bildu	UPN-PP-Ciudadanos
Logroño	PP	PSOE-Partido Riojano

Source: own elaboration based on data from digital platforms.

### 3.5. Number of inhabitants

There are large differences between the number of inhabitants of the different capital cities of the autonomous communities. There are smaller cities, such as Santiago de Compostela and Toledo, medium-sized municipalities such as Logroño and Pamplona, and large urban areas such as Barcelona and Madrid.

Table 3. Number of inhabitants

Capital of the CCAA	Number of inhabitants (INE,2021)
Santiago de Compostela	81.714
Toledo	85.449
Logroño	150.808
Pamplona	203.081
Santa Cruz de Tenerife	208.563
Las Palmas de Gran Canaria	378.675
Palma	419.366
Murcia	460.349
Zaragoza	675.301
Sevilla	684.234
Barcelona	1.636.732
Madrid	3.305.408

<sup>2</sup> The formation of Podemos includes all the political groups that are part of it, as is the case of Barcelona en Comú Podem or Ahora Madrid.

Source: own elaboration based on INE data (2021).

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Citizen participation platform

The search for new strategies to make digital citizen participation a reality has led to the creation and expansion of citizen participation platforms. As Anttiroiko (2016: 922) points out, these digital spaces allow access to individuals and engage them, facilitating dialogue, the convergence of ideas, decision-making and political integration. This situation is leading to a transformation of democracy in favor of a mixed system between representativeness and citizen participation.

In the case of Spain, in less than 10 years most of the capital cities of the autonomous communities have implemented a platform that serves to incorporate electronically the voice of citizens in public decision-making.

Now, is it better to have a space like Cónsul or Decidim or a platform of its own? Undoubtedly, having a space like Cónsul or Decidim has more positive effects than creating a citizen participation platform from scratch and only for a specific public administration and these consequences can be summarized in two arguments: community feeling and being at the forefront of developments.

Firstly, it creates and expands a sense of community between the people and the organizations that manage it, reaching also to the citizens. The feeling of being part of a community improves the well-being and mental health (Morrison, Epstude and Roese, 2012) and, at the same time, it creates relationships of loyalty, trust, feelings of identity and security (Corona, 2020) among all those who are part of it. As an example, Decidim is a collaborative project born and developed by professionals with different profiles (computer scientists, sociologists, political scientists, architects...).

At the same time, it is positive for citizens that the different public administrations use the same participation channel (or, alternatively, two, but not a different participation platform for each public entity) because it makes it easier to understand and participate. If each public administration has its own participation portal, it is possible that this situation acts as a gap for citizens: instead of learning how all the platforms work, they may decide not to participate. If all public entities use the same channel, or, alternatively, one of the two channels, it means that citizens only have to learn how it works once or twice, saving a lot of time. As an example, if the city council and the regional government each carry out a participatory process and use the same platform, this will favor participation because with the first experience they will learn the steps to follow, within the digital space for citizen participation, for the next processes.

Secondly, closely linked to the feeling of belonging is the fact of being at the forefront of knowledge. In the case of both Decidim and Cónsul, the fact that the platforms are worked on in a collaborative manner means they are updated progressively, strengthening the strengths and reconverting the weaknesses by measures that eliminate them, or at least reduce them.

### 4.2. Year of creation

As previously mentioned, the first platform to arrive in Spain is Consul in Madrid in 2015, then Barcelona in 2016 and, little by little, other cities join too. It is important to remember that between 2016-2017, in the midst of the crisis of representative democracy, in Spain the big issue that was on the political, public and media agenda was the *procés* (also known as the independence or separatist movement in Cataluña) that materialized with the holding of a referendum in Cataluña. Whether the referendum was legal or not, held on October 1<sup>st</sup> of 2017, the preparation of this event favored and accelerated the creation of digital citizen participation mechanisms. In this line, Marín and Tresserras (2018:22) defend that behind the independence movement is the need to find channels of active participation in public decision-making, beyond the election of representatives every four years. The truth is that in 2016 only the capitals of Madrid and Barcelona had citizen participation platforms and in 2017 there were seven municipalities that joined (being the year of the boom of these digital spaces). The call effect of having a platform influenced the expansion of these participation channels, although it was much lower after 2017.

### 4.3. Number of participatory processes

The number of participatory processes evaluates whether citizen participation has been maintained over time, or whether, on the contrary, it is an isolated experience of little importance. In this line, Entrena (2022: 106) argues that citizen participation is a reality that is here to stay with the purpose of making decisions according to the general interest.

For Brugué, Gifreu and Casademont (2019: 16) the expansion of direct democracy experiences, extrapolable to participatory processes<sup>3</sup>, is justified through four arguments: the increase of the citizenry in being able to have direct access to public decision-making; the loss of trust in institutions and the people who govern them; the emergence of new populisms; the growing difficulty of making decisions on public policies that are increasingly complex; and the imitation effect (also called fashion or butterfly) that makes representatives feel the need to elaborate and execute experiences of participatory democracy.

With the data shown above, it is clear that the impact of the participatory processes has not been equal in all the cities studied. Barcelona is the great success of participation with over 100 processes, followed by Madrid. It makes sense that Barcelona and Madrid are precisely the cities that have carried out the most processes, since they are where the first platforms of citizen participation in Spain were created. It should be noted that, although in Barcelona the platform was created later than in Madrid, the impact has been greater. For Peña (2019:94) this situation is justified because Decidim-Barcelona has led not only to a greater amount of information accessible to citizens, but also to a greater number of people participating, in comparison to previous experiences. In fact, The Innovation in

<sup>3</sup> Participatory processes are made up of mechanisms of deliberative democracy (speaking) and direct democracy (voting).

Politics Institut GmbH awarded Barcelona the European Capital of Democracy award for the period 2023-2024.

The third city with more participatory processes is Zaragoza. This municipality, although it was already carrying out participatory processes before the creation of its platform in 2021, in less than three years it has grown exponentially in the number of processes carried out. Surely, this situation was justified by the presence of Podemos (a formation born as a result of the economic, political and social crisis of 2008) in the city's government.

Next, with a barely wide gap, are Palma with 37, Santa Cruz de Tenerife with 35, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria with 36 and Pamplona with 11. For the moment, in these four cities participatory processes are being carried out, which guarantees that the digital participatory culture has been created, but it still needs to be established.

Murcia, Logroño and Toledo are municipalities where participatory processes are isolated cases. All these three cities have less than 10 processes, which may be evidence that the need for participatory processes is based on the fashion effect.

It should not be forgotten that in the case of Sevilla and Santiago de Compostela the number of participatory processes they have carried out cannot be evaluated because the respective city councils have not published them.

#### 4.4. Political Party

In the 2015-2019 term there were 10 capitals that incorporated citizen participation platforms as a channel so that citizens could be present in public decision making. Of these ten cities all except Santa Cruz de Tenerife and Logroño were governed by left-wing formations. In the next legislature, 2019-2023, the two cities that joined the citizen participation platforms, at the time this digital space was created, were governed by right-wing parties (in both cases governments of PP with Ciudadanos).

In Spain, the creation and expansion of participation platforms is linked to the mobilization of 15M, also known as Los Indignados. As a consequence of 15M, movements of citizen platforms were created, such as Plataforma Afectados por la Hipoteca or Plataforma en Defensa a la Enseñanza pública, and left-wing political parties such as Podemos. According to Keanne and Feenestra (2014), the citizens who were part of these movements were constantly asking themselves "who decides what, when and why" and it is precisely these questions that are raised in citizen participation.

For the first time in the history of Spain, with the movement of Los Indignados, citizens organized themselves through the Internet. The technological activists of 15M and the subsequent movements that were created from this one ended up marking a before and after in the transfer of democratic innovations to political parties and institutions (especially those at the municipal level) (Romanos and Sabada, 2016). This situation has made it possible to advance in mechanisms of participatory democracy by creating the techno-political model of democracy or, in other words, this context has led to the creation of platforms for citizen participation.

Although the origin and expansion of citizen participation platforms, at least in the cities studied in this article, have come from the left-wing, there are cities where the government is formed by right-wing parties and they promote and/or continue it. As an example, Santa Cruz de Tenerife launched the platform with a government between PP and Ciudadanos. Another example is that of Madrid, although the platform was created by a left-wing party (Más Madrid), the coalition government of the following legislature (2019-2023), formed by PP and Ciudadanos, continued to apply citizen participation measures. The imitation effect between cities may have influenced this contagion, this would explain why after the creation of Cónsul in Madrid and Decidim in Barcelona other cities wanted to join the digital world of citizen participation.

#### 4.5. Number of inhabitants

The cities studied do not have a common pattern of number of inhabitants. For example, there are cities such as Barcelona and Madrid with more than 1,000,000 inhabitants and others, such as Santiago de Compostela and Toledo, with less than 90,000.

The question that needs to be asked is: is a large or small city more ideal for citizen participation? The data of this research shows that there is no correlation evidence showing that the greater the number of inhabitants, the greater the participation is. However, it is true that the two most populated capitals are the ones that have more participatory processes, but as has been mentioned throughout the article, this may be due to the fact that they are the first two municipalities in Spain to develop digital citizen participation.

### 5. Conclusion

Citizen participation platforms provide public entities with a tool to improve the link between the public sector and citizens and vice versa. In this way, a model of participatory democracy is created and expanded, in which public administrations are more connected and immersed in the social environment and participate in the network formed by citizens and stakeholders (Chadwick and May, 2003). Undoubtedly, one way to evaluate the quality of digital democracy is to study citizen participation platforms. In the case study of this research, it has been identified, for now, that 14 of the 18 capital cities have established participation platforms as a channel for collecting the citizens' opinions. All of these 14 cities, except Valencia and Oviedo, have a single participation platform.

In the 12 municipalities that have been analyzed in more detail, it has been possible to identify that there are three variables that have been able to justify the current state of citizen participation platforms in the capital cities of the autonomous communities: year of creation; number of processes, linked to the age of the platform; and creation and expansion of the digital space with the party (or parties) that is in government.

First, although citizen participation platforms arrived in Spain in 2015, the year 2017 marked a before and after. In just one year, it went from two capital cities having a platform to seven, a success that over time has not materialized so that all capitals had at least one participation platform.

Secondly, there is a clear relationship between the number of participatory processes and the time at which the platform was created; thus, the older the digital space is, the more participatory processes have been carried out.



However, there are two exceptions worth mentioning: Barcelona and Zaragoza. On one hand, Decidim-Barcelona was created a year after Cónsul, even so the impact has been greater, and this situation has led to more processes being carried out in the Catalan capital city than in Madrid. On the other hand, Zaragoza is a success story. The city council launched the citizen participation platform in 2021 and in just two years it had already carried out 46 experiences.

Third, as previous studies (such as that of Borge, Colombo and Welp, 2009) have shown and this article confirms once again, left-wing parties are more inclined to promote and develop mechanisms for citizen participation.

This work opens the door to further research on how the platforms in the capital cities of the autonomous communities are developing and, in the event that they do not exist, being created. At the same time, it also opens the focus to identify new variables that justify why in certain cities the quality and quantity of platforms is higher than in others.

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