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The Citizen Participation of Urban Movements in Spatial Planning: A Comparison between Vigo and Porto

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Abstract

The urban planning of municipal territory is still a key element of urban politics despite competition from other types of spatial planning and the influence of supra-local policies such as those introduced by European institutions. To gauge its importance, I selected the last two master plans developed in the cities of Vigo (Spain) and Porto (Portugal) and examined the contributions of urban movements to citizen participation in these plans. The periods of transition to democracy in both cities prompted the appearance of important citizen movements, but these have evolved differently in each city. This article describes the evolution of these movements in both cities and explains why they culminated in a conflictive participation model in the master plan of Vigo, while in Porto the opportunities for citizen participation in the master plan were neutralized. To conclude, it is argued that this comparison reveals the importance of local contexts of urban governability shaped by a history of strategic interactions between urban movements and elites, which reduces the validity of neoliberal conceptions of governance to explain citizen participation in relation to spatial planning.

Introduction

How relevant are urban movements in local politics today? What significant changes have taken place in urban politics and movements in the last 40 years? And, more specifically, how have the forms of interaction between urban movements and urban planning policies evolved? These are very general questions and the answers vary enormously depending on the countries and cities considered. This study attempts to

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offer specific answers through the examination of two cases: the cities of Porto (Portugal) and Vigo (Spain).

First of all, my research is based on two basic premises: (1) what is at stake in the interactions between urban movements and master plans is an essential dimension of democracy which, for simplicity's sake, we may define as 'citizen participation'; (2) a holistic-theoretical approach is needed to understand and explain these interactions, i.e. one that considers the historical evolution of these phenomena and their multiple social and spatial dimensions.

In recent decades, experts on this topic have focused on particular dynamics of citizen participation in urban matters regarding the concept of 'governance' (Peters, 2000). Although it has been defined with very different meanings — some authors such as Healey (1997) have emphasized its positive and progressive connotations, whereas others have criticized its conservative aspects, notably Jessop (2003) and Santos (2005) — it has had a considerable discursive impact from the moment it was widely adopted and promoted by European institutions, and whenever these have had any say in local urban policies (Michel, 2007). Rarely have theoretical approaches of governance taken into consideration the local history of urban movements. Like the rest of the built-up environment, the history of social and political interactions, organizations and experiences represents, in my opinion, a set of pre-existences that conditions every new urban planning policy.

The term 'urban movements' covers a socially diverse network of organizations and groups (such as environmental, women's, youth, cultural, health or sports associations) with different interests and degrees of involvement in the processes of urban planning. Planners, however, tend to restrict it to neighbourhood associations. Thus, during studies to define urban plans only some local neighbourhood associations from specific districts are called upon to participate, along with individual residents and corporate organizations, such as business associations or trade unions. The opening up to other social collectives is slightly greater in the strategic planning of cities or Local Agenda 21 initiatives, but rarely manages to integrate the whole network of urban movements. This absence is surprising from a theoretical standpoint, particularly in the case of those authors who initially encouraged this field of study with an enriching holistic approach (Castells, 1986) but who have subsequently limited their analyses to highlighting the scarce capacities of urban movements to respond to the challenges of economic globalization, thus emphasizing their localist, defensive and regressive nature and their easy co-option by local governments (Borja and Castells, 1997; Castells, 1999; see, for critical reviews, Lowe, 1986; Marcuse, 2002; Martínez, 2003). Following authors who emphasized the importance of the interactions between urban movements and urban planning policies (Pickvance, 1985; Mayer, 1993; Fainstein and Hirst, 1995), I will try to offer specific evidence for the two cities considered.

Other studies focus on institutionally recognized citizen organizations that for preference use participation channels provided by local authorities. This is the case, for example, with an interesting piece of comparative research on four cities (two Spanish and two Italian), which concludes that institutionally promoted opportunities for citizen participation depend on the political affinity between associations and the governing political parties (Navarro, 1998). Consequently, although municipalities are deemed to provide the ideal setting for participative democracy, it has been shown that partisan interests largely condition how the experiences develop. However, the aforementioned study does not provide sufficient information on the situations at the level of policy formation processes and within the social organizations studied. Another shortcoming of this type of study is the fact that it focuses solely on participative institutions recognized or promoted by the authorities and on interactions relating mainly to the distribution of public resources and the management of services, ignoring those relating to territorial planning in particular.

It is therefore obvious that different participative processes may take place outside institutional channels and be dominated by informal citizen organization networks.

This is the paradigmatic case with the squatting movement, whose activities consist in the occupation of empty dwellings and the creation of self-managed social centres in different European cities. Existing studies on this subject have combined approaches traditionally used to analyse social movements with others from the field of urban sociology (see, for example: Mikkelsen and Karpantschof, 2001; Pruijt, 2003; Adell and Martínez, 2004). In various countries, the connections between these groups of activists transcend the scale of a single city so that their mutual support networks simultaneously have urban, state and transnational dimensions, derived from their origins in 'alterglobalization' movements (Martínez, 2007). With regard to urban planning, their forms of participation have generally been radically opposed to specific plans for urban renewal. In fact, much of their participative activity consists in drawing attention to underlying urban conflicts such as speculation with abandoned buildings or existing bureaucratization in the management of public services and institutional civic centres. Thus, this movement is an interesting example within the urban movements of the broad repertoire of protest actions involved in both citizen participation in urban planning and other dimensions of youth culture and local public policies.

Squatter activists, environmental associations, housing cooperatives, public artists and fringe inhabitants of cities or those who survive in the informal economy, find it difficult to participate actively in official urban planning processes (despite not ceasing to do so in many areas of public life: Friedmann, 1992). In recent decades, many environmental organizations have obtained greater legitimacy and been more frequently called upon to participate (Healey, 1997). In some cities, such as Montevideo, the housing cooperatives have also managed to become collective actors with respected powers of intermediation in local urban matters (Villasante, 1995; Chávez and Carballal, 1997). On the other hand, if we focus more specifically on the experiences of 'participatory budgets' in Brazilian cities, we find that such experiments combining representative and direct democracy do not attribute any privileged status to pre-existing social organizations; instead, they start by calling open assemblies for any individual citizens interested in such issues (Santos, 2003). Moreover, urban planning is not the main issue to be deliberated; the debate focuses on direct investments in public services and equipment. Participation, therefore, focuses on objectives such as the social redistribution of wealth, and urban planning becomes a subsidiary process of the former and does not necessarily enjoy the same level of participation.

My aim here is to distinguish the role played by different social organizations, the networks they form and their different experiences of citizen participation in relation to urban planning processes — at the municipal level. As mentioned previously, this requires focusing on the interactions between urban movements and those responsible for urban planning, but through a historical and holistic approach (Harvey, 1996; Douglass and Friedmann, 1998; Villasante, 2006) which takes into account the aforementioned institutional and non-institutional backgrounds, the local and supralocal contexts (Sassen, 1998), and which is not limited to isolated experiences of participation (or pseudo-participation) in urban planning matters (Goodman, 1977; Susskind et al., 1983; Darke, 1990; Forester, 1999; Sclavi et al., 2002). This article compares the cases of Vigo and Porto as centres of important metropolitan areas in the north-west of the Iberian Peninsula. Each metropolitan area has approximately a million inhabitants (around 1,300,000 in Greater Porto, and 700,00 in Vigo and the municipalities under its influence). However, each central municipality has less than 300,000 persons registered as residents in the census (Vigo: 294,772 in 2008; Porto: 221,800 in 2008). Both cities are surrounded by many highly dispersed towns and villages (there is also a city with a large population adjacent to Porto, Vila Nova de Gaia, which had 310,086 inhabitants in 2008), which vary enormously in size, with the denser occupation and urban development along the entire coast, to the detriment of inland areas. From a residential and demographic standpoint, however, it is the municipalities near the two cities that have grown fastest in the last two decades,

absorbing inhabitants and competing with the central cities as the traditional poles of attraction. As a result, these metropolitan areas have been shaped and fuelled in the last decade by a strong flow of *suburbanization*.

Apart from these similarities, there are two basic reasons that prompted me to make this comparison: firstly, the urban movements in both cities had a notable influence on local politics during and after the periods of transition to democracy from the mid-1970s in both Spain and Portugal (hence, we could call them 'transitional movements'); and secondly, both cities have developed in similar ways towards a greater, albeit partial, *Europeanization* of their local policies, sharing the same peripheral location and their participation (together with another 32 municipalities from Galicia and northern Portugal) in an official lobby called *Eixo Atlântico do Noroeste Peninsular*, dedicated to obtaining European Union funds to benefit its members (López 2004: 55; Cárdenas *et al.* 2008: 14). Lastly, their proximity (they are less than 150 km from one another) has meant that their reciprocal economic and cultural ties have steadily increased, accompanied by a certain degree of rivalry when attempting to attract capital investment (in maritime transportation, automobile industries, business services, etc.) and consumers (of the airport, of large shopping centres, of tourist attractions, etc.).

My initial questions are significantly contextualized by: (1) the metropolitan configuration; (2) the transition to democracy; and (3) the Europeanization of local policies. What I am interested in here is determining how citizen participation has developed in the field of urban planning within the framework of those three political conditioning factors and a unique set of urban movements. This participation is, in my opinion, one of the key aspects of the interaction of urban movements with local governments in recent decades. In fact, a surprising and stimulating factor in my research has been to observe that these interactions have evolved in very different ways from very similar origins.

In the case of Vigo, I observed that urban planning has always been a key issue in public debate and has continued to give rise to controversial forms of citizen participation that have kept urban movements active over the last three decades. However, in Porto most urban planning issues have been gradually omitted from public debates, and, as a result, urban movements have only focused their efforts on specific parts of the city or on certain environmental and cultural aspects. The urban movements in both cities have changed over time, with the appearance of divisions within them and the diversification of citizen participation activities. However, what we need to determine is why in Vigo these movements are still a matter of concern and dispute, due to urban planning, and why the same has not occurred in Porto, particularly if we focus on the last two processes of revision of the master plans in both municipalities.

Analyses show that regulated urban planning is still a key part of local policies and has not been replaced by other more ambitious forms of spatial planning (i.e. strategic planning of cities or Local Agenda 21). My thesis is that their degrees of openness to the influence of urban movements vary according to specific conditions, some associated with the local political context and others relating to the specific dynamics of urban movements. Furthermore, in the cases studied the influence of contextual variables such as the Europeanizing trends in territorial planning, has had less of an impact than expected in terms of broadening the scope of action for citizen participation.

The next section highlights some significant features of the comparative methodology adopted and the hypothesis underpinning my arguments. This is followed by a concise definition of the concepts of 'urban planning' and 'citizen participation' in open discussion with the paradigm of governance. The final two sections before the conclusions concentrate on explaining different details of the cities of Vigo and Porto, emphasizing the processes of urban planning and the evolution of urban movements in both cities.

Hypothesis and methodological approach used to compare both cities

Let us return to the initial questions. How do urban movements participate in urban planning processes? What is the centrality of both processes at *local* political level (mainly municipal but also at immediately lower and related levels, namely neighbourhoods, and at the higher metropolitan level)? What has changed with the emergence of the political framework of 'urban governance'? Since this study compares developments in two cities, we could synthesize this entire set of problems in the following question: why and how do actions by urban movements that influence urban planning occur?

The changes in the influence citizens have on urban planning can be observed in different cities and within the same city at different points in time. My thesis is that citizen influence was greater in Vigo than in Porto during the revision of the last master plan, but this process was important in both cities in previous decades (always more in Vigo than in Porto) and, in particular, during the first years of the transition from the dictatorship to democracy. Nevertheless, I also consider that the influences of citizen participation on urban planning have not transformed the conventional dynamics of urban policies in either city. Urban planning processes are still very resistant to pressure from individual citizens and organized urban movements. In particular, even when some participative procedures are implemented, many important decisions (the 'hard core' of planning) are only made by planners and the economic and political elites. The evolution of urban movements and their interactions with planners and elites, determines the degree of variation of the influence that citizens have in the process of planning.

Significantly, the very notion of 'influence' is problematic because it may relate to very different practices (how to create debates, make technical information transparent and accessible, channel allegations, handle negotiations with specific collectives, etc.) and effects (such as greater or lesser willingness of experts and authorities to modify their prior decisions, greater or lesser consensus on the model of urban growth, better or worse distribution of resources and satisfaction of the social needs of the population, etc.). Hence, I decided to indicate only the most general and relevant features of the interactions between urban movements and urban planning policies.

In my theoretical framework, I assumed that a series of phenomena may condition urban planning to different degrees; citizen participation is one such phenomenon. However, citizen participation in turn depends on different phenomena that may either favour or restrict it. These phenomena are similar to those that influence urban policies and may even include, in a type of recursive loop, the actual framework of urban policies. For example, studies prior to the preparation of a new urban plan may awaken the interest, and combine the forces, of urban movements that until then focused on other questions or were internally uncoordinated. At the same time, this awakening process will probably be aimed at trying to bring influence to bear throughout the entire planning preparation and management processes. However, through well-organized and dynamic citizen organizations, urban movements may be strengthened and begin actively working in different areas, including those linked to urban planning; hence, the development of a new general plan becomes, without any *recursiveness*, just another objective of their regular participative actions.

What was interesting in the analysis of Vigo and Porto was that the unique features of a transition to democracy and a Europeanization of urban policies could suggest reasonable expectations in favour of increased citizen participation in urban planning matters. More specifically, our first working hypothesis initially established that the growing prestige achieved by city strategic plans and the elaboration of Local Agenda 21 on environmental issues (both adopted in Vigo, while in Porto only LA21 was launched in 2006), would have opened new possibilities for citizen participation in relation to urban planning. Instead, I propose a second, slightly more sceptical hypothesis, which argues that citizen participation is constrained by local political history, including the

history of urban policies, urban movements and power relations between the different social actors. In short, my observations indicate that the momentum from *transitional* urban movements is more favourable to the persistence of citizen participation than *top-down* approaches, in keeping with governance-style policies, to citizen participation. One could also move one step back and explain why urban movements appear during periods of democratic transition, although that is not the objective here (see, for example, Pickvance 1985). For me it is crucial to know why active urban movements with the same origins persisted longer in one city than in the other, particularly if we examine their concerns regarding urban planning matters.

The answer to this question would lie in my final hypothesis: from those origins to the present day, local political history has followed a different course in each city, as we shall see later. Furthermore, the Europeanization of urban policies would not have been sufficiently cohesive to standardize these courses and the levels of intensity of citizen participation in both cities, despite their proximity and certain structural similarities. Finally, the withdrawal of urban movements in Porto must also be explicable by considering their dynamics of internal participation: the insufficient recruitment of new activists, forms of resources management, democratic culture, strategic definition of vindicated priorities, co-option of leaders by political parties, scarce mobilization capacities, etc.

From a methodological standpoint, various empirical sources of information were used in this study. In the case of Vigo, I have gathered observations over the last 10 years. During the process of elaboration of the last master plan I was responsible for coordinating a sociological study entrusted by the city council to a planning company. Data collected in 2001 and 2002 were mainly obtained from more than 20 meetings with neighbourhood associations, 25 personal interviews, 3 focus groups, and meetings with other researchers and planners involved. From 2002 to 2007 I also applied participant observation in public exhibitions, debates and demonstrations. The main sources of information in this period were the local newspapers and the journal published by local developers (APROIN) which included many interviews with planners and local politicians, although many informal conversations with activists and eight formal interviews (six with civic activists, one with a member of the team of planners and one with the spokesman for the developers)¹ were also used. In the case of Porto, the main field work during 2006 and 2007 consisted of consulting the municipal publication (Porto de Encontro), newspapers and documents provided by the city planners (mainly statistics and names of organizations involved in the process of citizen participation). I also conducted more than 12 personal interviews with key people (former and current planners, and activists from different civic and environmental organizations).² Participant observation was not possible in this case because the process of planning had been concluded when the field work was developed. All of these different information sources were directed to reconstructing the interactions between urban movements and urban planning, but it was necessary to complement them with books and articles published about this issue.

- 1 Formal interviews in Vigo: Miguel Font (APROIN, Developers' organization), Maribel González (urban planner), José Ángel (neighbourhood association of Matamá), Basilio (community development plan of Teis), Enrique Estévez (civic platform against the master plan), Manuel (neighbourhood association of Cabral), Celso (civic platform from Coruxo).
- 2 Formal interviews in Porto: Ana Borges (neighbourhood association of Massarelos), Henrique Pedroso (neighbourhood association of Massarelos), Armando Herculano (users of public transport), Carlos Carvalho (neighbourhood association and housing cooperative of Bouça), Chalana Pinto (social worker in the neighbourhood of Lagarteiro), Paula Guerra (sociologist) and 10 residents in the neighbourhood of Lagarteiro, Lourdes Carreira (municipal planner in charge of master plan), Manuela Juncal (former municipal planner in charge of the master plan), Nuno Quental (environmental association), Soares Luz (environmental, housing and civic organizations), Virginia Sousa (former person in charge of European programme Urban).

Urban planning policies and urban movements: Who plots the course? Who participates? What constraints are there?

The concepts of 'urbanism', 'urban planning', 'planning policies', 'urban planning policies' and even 'urban policies' are used in this study to mean the same thing. They all refer exclusively to the regulation of uses of physical space at municipal level and to the development, application and management of this planning; in other words, forms of public planning in general, with an important emphasis on territory, particularly local territory ('municipal' when referring to the administrative demarcation of the municipality as a whole, and 'urban' when referring solely to the nuclei of greatest density of construction and with most facilities and infrastructures) (Pickvance, 1994: 127; see also Friedmann, 1991; Font, 2003; and Noguera, 2003; and for differences between Spanish and Portuguese urban systems, see, for instance, Portas, 1983; Zárate, 1991; and Gaspar and Jensen-Butler, 1992).

When I say that urban movements interact with the urban planning process, I am referring to both the social groups responsible for developing urban planning and the ideas and practices generated in these processes. Although the theory and practice of urban planning has traditionally been dominated hegemonically by professional groups of engineers, architects and jurists, many different 'technical' social actors actually participate in this process and in an increasingly multidisciplinary manner. In this respect, it is worthwhile distinguishing those technical experts directly responsible for and involved in the preparation and management of planning from those who defend their corporate interests as members of professional associations, research centres or other organizations. The legal authorization of urban planning projects and decisions on their management and implementation are the responsibility of social institutions which we might define as 'political', although members of the municipal government and representatives of other political parties and other competent supra-local institutions also participate in such decisions.

Nevertheless, urban planning is not just the result of the actions of these social groups. In societies dominated by capitalist economic systems, the most influential social group is formed by the economic elite, and in particular by entrepreneurs and business organizations operating in the property markets (real estate promotion and sale, construction, mortgage financing, real estate brokerage, etc.) and all those with more or less immediate interests in terms of their spatial localization and their need for general supply and communications infrastructures. This predominance distinguishes them clearly from other social actors and it would be confusing to conceive them as simply another part of the 'civil society' together with different citizen organizations and sometimes even (depending on their size, mutual relationships and context of action) with small land owners, small entrepreneurs and cooperative companies (Alford and Friedland, 1985; Logan and Molotch, 1987: 153–79; Fainstein, 1994).

To complete our starting assumptions, we would have to include in this overall picture other social factors that may influence urban planning processes. These factors are phenomena that may act in three directions: (1) as immediate causes of the decisions adopted in the preparation and management processes; (2) as contextual dimensions that indirectly restrict all these processes; (3) as mediate causes or specific conditions that allow different agents to act. Moreover, the form of intervention of the same phenomenon may vary. Changes in state legislation governing territorial planning management, for example, may lead directly to the substitution of obsolete municipal urban plans or indirectly establish the general directives to be followed in any urban planning process while the general law remains in force (see some examples in Suttles, 1990; Fainstein, 1994; Brindley *et al.*, 1996).

Demographic and residential localization dynamics, balances of power between different political and technical factions in institutional decision-making bodies, trends in the implementation or omission of public policies by state authorities, extensive

economic restructuring processes accompanying urban transformations and changes in the social and economic composition of districts, municipalities or regions, or the importance of citizen participation and lobbying activities have normally been identified as the most important structural dimensions for explaining the opening or closing of urban policies to *external* interventions (Pickvance, 1986). Consequently, it is difficult to determine *a priori* if the dynamics of citizen participation are the most influential of all these factors, particularly since these are in turn conditioned by several of these factors.

The notion of 'citizen participation' is actually extremely generic but it could be defined as the set of practices by which 'civil society', the population that does not govern or belong to the social elite, uses its capacities to intervene in collective life. This would mainly be a decision-making capacity (or, as pluralist theorists assume, the capacity to influence rulers' decisions: Alford and Friedland, 1985), but it also refers (from the standpoint of Weberian and conflictualist theorists) to: (1) the ability to publicly control the social distribution of resources and the way in which authorities that distribute these resources perform their duty; (2) the debate on the definition of rights and duties; and (3) access to institutions where matters of public interest are negotiated and conflicts of interest between actors are regulated. As democratic regimes have gradually become institutionalized within a framework of representation and preservation of a liberal economic system, the idea of 'citizen participation' would identify exercises of power on the part of insufficiently represented social groups subordinated at any structural level of social, economic, cultural or political inequality, thus considerably restricting our notion of 'civil society' (Gottdiener, 1984; Villasante, 1995; Friedmann, 1998; Forester, 1999; Cooke and Kotari, 2001). This emphasis on the subordinated features of participative agents is important since it is absent in some theoretical approaches to 'participative democracy' — such as those calling for a 'strong democracy' (Barber, 1984), 'urban regimes' (Stoker, 1995) and a 'new political culture' (Clark and Rempel, 1997).

Notwithstanding the foregoing, it is important to point out that this definition does not presuppose the naïve attribution of inherent progressive or emancipatory qualities to any participative practice. In fact, any subordinated social group in society may defend its own (or external) privileges and its own (or external) interests, which may be detrimental to other groups or most of the population. Minority or a specific group's interests that are achieved without causing any harm may even be defended although they may be detrimental due to the means used to fulfil said interests (Offe, 1985).

In matters relating to urban planning, it would be advisable to use the notion of 'urban participation'. However, the drawback of this is that what is 'urban' tends to refer to broader realities than those relating to the management of land usage; in this connection, it is worth recalling Wirth's famous conceptualization of 'urbanism as a way of life' (Wirth, 1938). Therefore, in my opinion, it is better to continue using the expression 'citizen participation in urban planning', although for simplicity's sake 'citizen participation' or 'urban participation' are sometimes used. In fact, 'urban movements' are defined as all social groups (mostly with a formal organization) engaging mainly but not exclusively in this participation, such as pro-affordable-housing actions, neighbourhood associations, environmental groups, etc. (Mayer, 1993; 2006; INURA, 1998; Hamel *et al.*, 2000). They participate actively in urban policies and may do so in relation to any public policy in specific parts of the city or at municipal, metropolitan or regional level, although their effects or mutual articulation may have national or international scope.

Urban movements evolve in the same cyclical manner as other social movements, fluctuating between periods in which their actions enjoy greater external projection and others in which they focus on more internal aspects. These *arrows* indicating the objectives of their participation therefore complement the different areas in which they

are involved, including urban planning matters, and the continuity of these activities in time. The organizations involved in these movements and those with which they interact are also very heterogeneous and enjoy relatively broad autonomy with respect to the economic and political elite compared with formal organizations like political parties, trade unions or companies (Pruijt, 2002; Martínez, 2003; Pickvance, 2003; Lake, 2006; Mayer, 2006).

In their most progressive form, urban movements exercise the 'right to change the city' (INURA, 1998; Harvey, 2003) or, if they have supra-local claims, 'contra-hegemonic globalization' (Santos, 2005). In any case, an empirical analysis of these movements cannot acritically pass judgement on their ideological orientation or ignore their historical evolution, their different manifestations in different cities around the world, the specific effects of their actions in any social structure and the contextual conditions and organizational resources that allow them to catalyse processes of citizen participation or prevent them from doing so (Pickvance, 2003).

What must be highlighted at this point is that both urban policies and urban movements have been influenced, in different ways according to their respective evolutions and qualities, by the paradigm of governance in its most neoliberal form (Healey, 1997: 208; Peters, 2000; Blanco and Gomà, 2002: 35–6) and extensively promoted through European Union policies (Le Galès, 2002; Michel, 2007). Within this paradigm, all social groups are encouraged to participate in a network, regardless of whether or not they are subordinated in social structures — elites, movements, political representatives and experts — from both public and private spheres. The selection of participating organizations is arbitrary and depends on who manages each process. However, this apparent horizontality conceals underlying inequalities in resources and decision-making capacities (Geddes, 2006; similar political use has been made of 'social capital' theories, see Mayer, 2003).

These types of public–private 'partnership' (Fainstein, 1994; Stoker, 1995; Brindley et al., 1996; Martínez, 1999) are only consultative in nature; their decisions do not necessarily bind or commit their members, in contrast to the regulatory nature still characteristic of many aspects of urban planning. Significantly, this consensual philosophy and its prescriptive implementation have been more pervasive in public policies than in capitalist enterprises. This may be due to the pressures of a context in which the privatization of public services has gradually increased and the criteria of commercial efficiency and profitability have been adopted, increasingly with less opposition, in preference to the criteria of social need and justice when defining public policies. For example, in this last decade strategic planning of cities and Local Agenda 21, where consensual decisions are a key aim, have become new references for traditional urban planning.

Therefore, it is easy to deduce that the ideas and applications of governance only cover a small and controversial spectrum of the different potential forms of urban government and participation. For this reason, it seems necessary to continue observing the interactions between urban movements and other urban actors involved in urban planning from the perspective of 'governability', i.e. taking into account the complexity, heterogeneity and conflictivity of these interactions. I prefer the classic term 'governability' (Offe, 1992) to the Foucauldian one 'governmentality' (Burchell et al., 1991), because the former refers clearly to the capabilities of elites with regard to maintaining the status quo or increasing their privileges. This suggests the inevitability of social conflict, but also the different dimensions, forms and intensity of the social interactions involved. In fact, in the absence of far-reaching changes to urban planning regimes and even state public policies, any experiences of participatory democracy must necessarily coexist and interconnect, either directly or indirectly, with the conventional forms of representative democracy, with experiences of governance-like policies and with market rules, particularly those which are prioritized by the mass media. To conclude, the autonomy of citizen initiatives is more relative than absolute since it is conditioned by that coexistence.

Vigo: the more open to participation urban planning is, the more controversial urban politics becomes

The city of Vigo is located in the northwest of Spain. The population living in the city's metropolitan area totals almost 300,000 inhabitants, but it is only the largest of a series of municipalities that have a combined population of more than 500,000 inhabitants (including those living in Vigo itself) or more than 1 million if we take into account the population within the central city's area of influence, which also includes a number of northern Portuguese towns and villages (VV.AA., 1961; Dalda and Souto, 1994; Precedo, 1988). Vigo occupies a position of centrality in the Euro-region formed by Galicia and northern Portugal. The Atlantic highway that runs along the entire coast and down to Lisbon is the main communication route between the two other similarly-sized cities, A Coruña and Porto, which concentrate most of the Euro-regional population, each approximately 150 km from Vigo. From a demographic and productive standpoint, its geographical location was, until recently, peripheral in relation to the main Spanish cities (Álvarez Blázquez, 1979). However, Vigo has enjoyed continued strong economic growth since the 1960s, fuelled mainly by its port activity, fishing sector, ship-building, chemical and textiles industries, stone and wood exports, and in particular its iron and steel industry boosted enormously by the establishment of a Citroën factory in the city. During the 1980s, as in many other old industrial areas, an important economic restructuring process began that prompted a shift in land usage, labour and industry as a whole towards a diversified and economically more relevant network of services (financial, logistical, management, commercial distribution, etc.) (Souto, 1990; Ruiz, 1993; Master Plan of Vigo, 2002).

There has been an intense process of residential and industrial construction on the coast for decades; mountainous inland areas are characterized more by dispersed settlements and many self-constructed homes. Numerous working- and middle-class neighbourhoods appeared next to the city's small medieval centre and the central business district (CBD), with its many modernist and rationalist buildings. Some upper-class enclaves also appeared on the most coveted parts of the coast and in the city centre. During the first half of the twentieth century, the city limits also grew with the inclusion of three nearby municipalities, although similar attempts since then to extend these boundaries have failed, and the bill to formally constitute a 'metropolitan area' is still a subject of continuous controversy between political parties (local news from the late 1990s and 2000s). In fact, while the population of the municipality of Vigo was formed by residents in the most consolidated urban areas and those living in more dispersed 'semi-rural' areas, over the last two decades the metropolitan towns and villages have grown continuously by attracting many young people who cannot afford the housing prices in Vigo itself (Master Plan of Vigo, 2002).

Urban planning started in Vigo in the nineteenth century, although attempts at urban management can be traced back to the middle ages owing to the city's importance as a defensive stronghold against military attacks by foreign forces. The establishment of the dictatorship in Spain (between 1936–39 and 1975) prevented the development of the first master plan (the so-called 'Palacios Plan'), which aimed to manage the entire municipal and metropolitan area on the rationalist principles of Le Corbusier and the Modern Movement (Pereiro, 1981; Garrido, 1994; Gefaell, 1996). After specific regulations that failed to deter corruption and speculation during the decades of greater economic growth under the Franco regime, the first general plan for the municipality as a whole was approved in 1971. This plan, like so many others in that period, overestimated population growth in the following decades and used a zoning system to classify land uses, largely ignoring the increasing number of illegal constructions in semi-rural areas (Souto, 1990). During the late 1970s up until the first democratic municipal elections after the dictatorship in 1979, an active urban movement was created mainly driven by neighbourhood associations. Their most immediate demands clearly focused on urban matters (water supply, drainage, road construction and asphalting, preservation of historical buildings, construction of schools, etc.) as well as strong demands for the political democratization of institutions and social life (Ruiz, 1993; Bouzada and Lorenzo, 1996). The same thing occurred in other Spanish cities, although during the 1980s these urban movements suffered an important crisis as a result of the co-option of many of their members and leaders by political parties, and due to the substantial improvement of urban services in response to their previous demands (Villasante, 1995).

In Vigo, however, more than 30 neighbourhood associations managed to overcome this critical trend and reorganized themselves into a federation that became very influential in local politics. At the same time, trade unions also developed a strong capacity to mobilize society against the industrial restructuring that took place during the 1980s and 1990s. Although these organizations were formally independent, many mutual links were established and their continual actions and public presence created a common core that also fostered the emergence of many other civic associations (Pérez, 2000). This was the ideal breeding ground for the next general plan for urban management, which was finally approved in 1993 and took into account many citizen proposals and demands (for example, by regulating many illegal constructions in semi-rural areas or by increasing the provision of state-funded housing) and promoted public debates and meetings (Souto, 1994). This experience legitimized the participation of neighbourhood associations and strengthened their interest in urban planning, but at that moment this was not the normal activity of these and other new associations (women, youth, environmental, sportive, cultural and so forth). Moreover, the sluggishness of administrative procedures for the preparation of this master plan and the specific plans that have been developed since then, coupled with the rapid economic and demographic changes that have taken place in the city during the last four decades, have widened the gap between urban planning and citizen organizations, with the exception of those located in the peripheral and semi-rural districts of the municipality.

Finally, the socio-economic composition of the urban movement in Vigo has changed in the last decade (Vázquez-Vicente, 2003). As in the rest of the country, there has been a new polarization of society between the middle and working classes with higher and regular incomes on the one hand, and women, young people and immigrants occupying the most flexible and unstable segments of the labour market on the other. As regards the associations, neighbourhood associations have preserved their capacity for federated organization and citizen mobilization at specific moments, but they have focused more on the management of socio-cultural centres and on the provision of certain social services, sharing these spaces of activism with new associations of ecologists, women, young people or solidarity movements. These dynamics were not even altered by the only two local conservative governments (between 1995 and 1999 and between 2004 and 2007) in the last three decades. As mentioned previously, the associations' still high capacity to mobilize originated from the long transition to democracy and their federative reorganization after the first municipal elections. Associations took part in the elaboration of the Municipal Regulation of Participation and in the creation of Advisory Boards. Both initiatives could also be highlighted (as suggested by Navarro, 1998) as further institutional bastions that favoured the continuity of participative experiences in

Work on the last general plan started in 2001. Planners were aware of the features of associations in the city and decided to use a *transparent* approach to prepare the plan (by 'transparency' I mean levels 4–6 of Arnstein's Ladder — placation, consultation and information (Arnstein, 1969) — which are very far from the more inclusive, consensual and communicative approaches of authors like Forester, 1999, and Healey, 1997). In particular, as official documents and direct observation showed, this consisted mainly in meetings between the team of planners and almost every neighbourhood association, on the one hand, and meetings with representatives from the different economic and political elites in the city, on the other. It was not an openly participative experiment; instead, the planners adopted a more problem-solving (Friedmann, 1991) and governance-like approach to avoid open conflicts (Santos, 2005). The planners were

always willing to listen to the suggestions and demands of any group, although most negotiation meetings were held with small and large land owners and with important real estate promoters and developers in the city. The planners also offered conferences, participated in many public debates, organized travelling exhibitions and disseminated much of the information available on the city council's web page. But many non-neighbourhood associations were excluded from that process (in the sense that they were not researched nor directly invited to meetings) and some self-organized collectives started to criticize the work on the master plan without having current interaction with the planners, municipal technicians or politicians in charge. The two main local newspapers were also polarized with respect to critiques, and only one gave regular space to protests.

In their public discourses, both the planners and the citizen organizations argued that one example of the high level of participation in this planning process was the large number of formally presented suggestions and statements. After the initial two-month preparation phase in 2002, planners received more than 3,500 suggestions on the proposed plan (Master Plan of Vigo, 2002); this number had increased to more than 60,000 amendments when the plan was initially approved in 2004 (I attended the exhibition where planners were available to listen to public requests while, simultaneously, many organized groups, professionals and individuals submitted their submissions; final figures were registered through official documents). These figures are striking when compared with those recorded in other Spanish cities, with much less citizen interest in master planning.

The process gave rise to new social debates and protests, as well as political lawsuits and legal proceedings. The opposition social-democrat party, four semi-rural associations, various collectives with environmental concerns and one of the most influential newspapers in Galicia opposed some of the main proposals contained in the plan, namely the construction of a new inland road that would lead to more intense urban development of semi-rural areas, and the allegedly strong increase in the potential density of construction which would fuel the growth of the real estate market to supposedly compete with the counter-urbanization effect of neighbouring metropolitan municipalities. Most of the federated neighbourhood associations, the municipal advisory council and other professional organizations were strongly in favour of the plan, and the former even mobilized publicly at specific moments, although the opposition groups, more in a minority, took to the streets more often between 2002 and 2008. Likewise, according to press reports, once the social-democrats gained control of the local council, real estate organizations and neighbourhood federations also joined the public protests, but in this case these two actors asked for some changes to the policy of public housing established by the regional government and accepted by the local one in order to modify the master plan, which delayed final approval until 2008.

Interestingly, the different evaluations of the plan at its very beginning — focused more on its urban planning aspects than on its form of participative management — were some of the main reasons for the rupture between the governing coalition formed by social-democrats and left-wing nationalists. This rupture handed local power to the right-wing conservative party which formed a minority government with nationalist support in the development of the plan. Public protests, legal battles and the influence of the social-democrats from the Autonomous Government of Galicia prevented the plan from being approved and in particular made it one of the most controversial local issues. After the 2007 local elections, a new government coalition was formed by the social-democrats and nationalists that managed to overcome the previous differences of opinion on the master plan.

As can be seen, a long history of disputes and the existence of a dense network of inter-associative relations since the times of the transition to democracy were favourable conditions that influenced the adoption of a *limited* approach to participation and governance by planners, and helped different collectives maintain very conflictive interactions with them — in turn dividing the city's urban movement. In addition to these

factors, preceding governance in the city should also be taken into account here, particularly an initial attempt in 1991 at a strategic plan for the metropolitan area that tried to launch a participatory process. This attempt was limited to consultations with experts, and it was not accompanied by a significant public debate. In 2001 a second attempt was made at metropolitan strategic planning that coincided with the attempts to develop the urban master plan. On this occasion, strategic planners consulted a much broader range of experts and social organizations, leaving an impression of unavoidable challenges that the urban planners largely felt obliged to continue. Similar attempts to 'open up' the process to minimum or apparent citizen participation occurred within Local Agenda 21 in 2004 and with the 'Urban' programme (supported by European Union funds) for the regeneration of the historical centre between 1998 and 2002. None of these processes was truly innovative from a technical or participative standpoint (in terms of the mutual recognition claimed by Forester, 1999, or in terms of improving the empowerment of deprived groups, as Friedmann, 1992, suggests), but all of them added to the numerous non-institutional forms of participation promoted in recent decades by neighbourhood associations and the other organizations that appeared with them or replaced them in most central and urban areas.

The final factor which, in my analysis, explains this evolution of the interactions between urban movement and urban planning in the city of Vigo are the differences inherent in the movement. For more than a decade now, neighbourhood associations based in the centre of the city have actually been losing their capacity to represent residents in their neighbourhoods, and urban planning is becoming less and less of a priority on their agendas. With the appearance of new associations, urban planning is an issue on which they *compete* more for local influence and supporters than old and peripheral associations. In fact, many neighbourhood associations in areas where urban structure is more consolidated were largely ignored — albeit with some exceptions — by planners in the participative process of the elaboration of the master plan. The semi-rural associations theoretically represent a smaller population, but they have stronger links with the population resident in their areas of influence. Moreover, urban planning is a core issue on their agendas because, above all, they defend a symbiotic model of urban development and rural-like lifestyle which is usually threatened by new urban plans. Thus, urban planners concentrated on consultations, negotiations and public exhibitions with these types of neighbourhood associations, although they could not avoid clashing with some of them and with environmental and alternative groups that joined them in rejecting the plan outright. The strange alliance of many of the federated neighbourhood associations (most of them traditionally close to left and nationalist standpoints) and real estate organizations in the defence of the master plan, first, and their refusal of later modifications of public housing, can be explained by considering the continuing minimally participative position adopted by the social-democrats when they achieved local power, as a way of balancing the previous relationship of forces.

Porto: closed participation in urban planning in the face of declining and changing urban movements

Porto is the most important city in northern Portugal and the traditional urban centre of the whole Greater Metropolitan Area of Porto, traditionally known as *Grande Porto* (Greater Porto, with more than 1,200,000 inhabitants). Porto itself has 222,000 inhabitants, much less than the 310,000 of Vila Nova de Gaia, the neighbouring municipality with which it forms a type of urban *continuum*. Like Vigo, during much of the last century Porto experienced continual economic and demographic growth. However, despite preserving its high population density from a territorial perspective, since 1980 Porto's municipal population has declined dramatically — by more than 60,000 over the last 20 years. This reduction has accounted for many population

increases in other metropolitan municipalities, particularly those nearest to the city (Gaia, Matosinhos, Maia and Gondomar mainly). Current legislation (Law 10/2003) required at least 350,000 inhabitants and 9 municipalities to form a Greater Metropolitan Area (Silva, 2004), which in the case of Greater Porto comprises more than 1,200,000 inhabitants (Fernandes, 2003; 2005; Breda-Vázquez and Oliveira, 2005; Lacerda and Martins, 2005; Pereira, 2005).

Compared with the country's capital, Lisbon, which has been the main beneficiary of the strong administrative centralization of the state (regionalization of the continental part of the country was rejected by referendum although it is still advocated by the parliamentary majority), the city of Porto has always displayed greater pride in its economic capacity and local policies. In fact, while Lisbon enhanced its international profile by organizing the 1998 International Exhibition, the historical centre of Porto was declared a World Cultural Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1996 and European Capital of Culture by the European Union in 2001. Local authorities and elites took advantage of all these city marketing opportunities to bring about changes beyond the industrial restructuring of the city that occurred during the 1980s. Traditional economic sectors such as textiles, ship building, food processing, etc. gradually lost physical space in the city and were sometimes displaced to peripheral municipal districts. In contrast, commercial and financial activities, wine export, tourism and real estate promotion reconverted the city and its outskirts into services providers (Fernandes, 1997; 1998; Magalhães, 1998; Silva, 2003). Good examples of this trend include the recent opening of large shopping centres (El Corte Inglés in 2006 in Gaia, and Ikea in 2007 in Matosinhos). In recent years, the city's transport system has been improved and now offers rapid connections between the port and airport, and a modern public metro system crosses the city and connects various metropolitan towns. However, internal road communications and the lack of high-speed rail links with Lisbon, Vigo and the rest of the Iberian Peninsula are persisting infrastructural problems that are difficult to resolve in the short term.

The urban structure of Porto shows significant differences with respect to Vigo. Firstly, the historical centre of Porto covers a larger area and many parts intersect with the central business district (CBD). Secondly, rural or semi-rural areas have rapidly disappeared from the municipality of Porto in recent decades, but not from neighbouring municipalities that have a clearly observable continuity with the urban area of Porto. Thirdly, socio-spatial divisions are marked by a main dividing line between the west and the east of the city, on the one hand, and the quality of the buildings, on the other. Statistical information and observation *in situ* showed that the eastern part of the city has a greater concentration of the working, lower and middle classes, whereas the western municipalities and public spaces (closest to the sea, from Foz to the beaches of Matosinhos) have larger concentrations of upper- and middle-class residential areas. However, the influence of urban movements from the Transitional Period (after 25 April 1974) is still evident in the evolution of urban forms: there are still many popular districts in the form of 'social neighbourhoods' of council or state-funded housing, or promoted by citizen associations and cooperatives along the western part of the city.

Housing problems in Porto have long been characterized by a persistent problem with areas of very low-quality, small and substandard housing, called *ilhas* ('isles'). Such problems were an important part of the breeding ground for the development of an urban movement in the years after the 1974 revolution which brought down the previous dictatorship. An active urban movement developed during the brief transitional period (between April 1974 and November 1975: Downs *et al.*, 1978; Santos, 1990; Rodrigues, 1999; Palacios, 2001) that led to the formation of numerous housing cooperatives (Ferreira, 1987; Nunes and Serra, 2003). In the following decades, these cooperatives continued to work intensely to promote affordable housing for the working and middle classes, despite the rapid decline in the mobilizing and associative capacity of residents' associations. The mobilization on housing issues promoted by the urban movement (associations and cooperatives) during the 1970s and after was reflected in the

achievement of significant improvements in social neighbourhoods and a substantial reduction, albeit incomplete, in the problem of the 'isles' (Pereira, 2003). Further reforms to buildings in 43 social districts were delayed until very recently and only in the lattermost years of the 2000s has there been a promotion of certain partial rehabilitation initiatives to restore the huge number of deteriorated old buildings in the historic centre (according to information recorded from municipal documents). The 'social disaffiliation' (unemployment, low incomes, marginality, etc.) of many of their residents and the shortcomings of public spaces in these areas also add a substantial amount of symbolic segregation in some of these social neighbourhoods.

The city's national importance is reflected in a long tradition of urban planning. Most planning attempts in the nineteenth century were unable to cover the whole city and were limited to specific streets, areas or important infrastructures such as the bridges over the River Douro (Marques et al., 1990). One of the first important plans in the early twentieth century focused explicitly on eradicating the 'isles'. However, only the proposed master plan of 1932 can really be defined as a 'modern' example of urban planning (zoning, renewal of the historic centre, etc.), parallel to the processes undertaken in Vigo and other European cities in the same period. Similarly, that plan was abandoned before it could be developed. However, many of these initial proposals were incorporated in the first master plan for the city in 1954, and the second, in 1962. While the first plan focused on regulating traffic, the second concentrated mainly on dealing with the problems of the social neighbourhoods promoted by the paternalistic ideology of the Estado Novo ('New State'), the Dictatorship between 1926 and 1974. As in the case of Vigo, these two plans were over-optimistic in their forecasts of population growth in future decades. Following the Carnation Revolution of 1974 that put an end to the dictatorial regime, studies for a new master plan began in 1978 but this was not legally approved until 1993. This master plan for the urban regulation of the city has been revised twice: in 1998 and 2005.

For the purposes of our research, it is also worthwhile recalling that this final revision took more than 5 years due to serious technical and political difficulties in a new episode similar to the one that occurred with the last master plan in Vigo. Until the last revision period (1998–2005), from a decision-taking standpoint urban planning was still a very technical and closed issue. However, national legislation introduced in 1999 (Decret-Law 380/1999, 22 September, based in the revision of the Constitution in 1997) and 2003 (Decret-Law 310/2003, 10 December, adding the state regional department — CCDR to the control of urban planning processes) allowed explicitly for different forms of citizen participation in urban planning (Correia, 2005; Silva and Syrett, 2006), although these favourable legal conditions were hardly exploited by traditional and new associations in Porto. Nevertheless, the planning process continued to be controlled by technical experts and politicians who had no interest in promoting extensive public debates on these issues. This was due in turn to conflicts within these groups and the municipal authorities themselves. With the exception of housing cooperatives, most urban associations were immersed in a long period of decline which started immediately after the transition to democracy. In fact, there were no precedents for extensive citizen participation in the debate on a master plan for the city — as happened in Vigo participative experiences were important only in relation to housing issues.

The intense urban movement that emerged from the transition received support, first, from the insurgent Armed Forces as well as, later, from an enthusiastic group of architects and urban planners who supported the associations from within the institutions (the so-called 'SAAL') of a state in crisis (Santos,1998; Palacios, 2001). At the beginning of the revolution, the 'residents' commissions' illegally occupied many buildings and land. The alliance of activists with SAAL technicians ensured that very participative processes developed to legalize these occupations, form housing associations and cooperatives, and eventually promote new housing complexes. Even under these circumstances, the urban planning of the entire municipal area has always been an untouchable issue for urban associations in Porto. However, the intense urban movement

during the transition created favourable conditions for self-management experiences in housing and a dense network of neighbourhood associations. The housing cooperatives gradually consolidated many of their real estate developments and have increased their economic power substantially right up to the present day (in both Porto and neighbouring municipalities, particularly in Matosinhos). It would be largely true to say, as various of our informants argued, that they *died* from their own success because the mobilization of citizens that gave rise to these movements no longer had a purpose once they had achieved their objectives, namely the attainment of affordable housing. Moreover, only the middle classes and the most prosperous members of the working class were economically able to endure the delay during years of construction, as happened with one of the most famous developments in the historical centre designed by Alvaro Siza (*A Bouca*).

During the 1980s and 1990s, the residents' associations lost many of their leaders to the political parties, were concentrated in cultural and welfare services highly dependent on public funds, and quickly lost citizen support for their activities and organization. The most important difference from the urban movement in Vigo is that in Porto they were unable to form a federation of, at least, all the neighbourhood associations that appeared very active at a specific moment in history (transition to democracy) and that shared very similar urban and political concerns. In this sense, the continuity of an urban movement in Porto in recent decades has been concealed by the confinement of housing cooperatives to the lower and middle classes, and by territorial confinement of the residents' associations at every specific district level. All these factors have consequently reduced the social flow that could have improved opportunities for greater citizen participation after the latest revisions of the master plan.

The total number of neighbourhood associations belonging to urban movements in Porto fell from around 40 in the 1970s to less than half that number by the early 1990s (Vilaca, 1993). Nevertheless, almost 600 associations were still registered in the city in the late 1990s, most defined as cultural associations (Lopes, 2000). At the same time, trade unions have gradually lost the influence they enjoyed in the past in both the associations and the local politics. The municipal depopulation mentioned previously and, in particular, the depopulation of the city's historic centre, coupled with incipient processes of 'gentrification', have also meant that urban interventions have been carried out without significant social opposition. Lastly, all these influential local factors were not compensated by other external factors acting on participative dynamics. The best example was the implementation of the EU's 'Urban' programme in one of the most deprived districts in eastern Porto. This programme, included as one of the 'best practices' of the EU, launched a number of citizen participation processes, but these were always limited locally to specific sectors and bore hardly any relationship to urban planning. As was showed in our conversations with activists from that and other areas, those processes had virtually no impact on urban movements and citizen participation initiatives in other parts of the city.

According to our interviews and documents, I found that the most important interactions between local authorities and urban movements during the last period of revision of the master plan stemmed from the initiatives of two environmental associations and from another formed by public transport users (metro-train users mainly). These entities managed to overcome the obstacles described previously relating to the lack of public transparency in the planning process. They overcame these barriers by presenting alternative technical proposals. Some leading activists in these associations had previously belonged to urban residential movements and housing co-ops, but most of these new organizations are led by young and technically very qualified activists. As a result, their criticisms of the planners were based on many very detailed arguments, although they were completely ignored after a number of meetings with municipal planners. Some of their claims culminated in a successful campaign by the environmental associations which managed to mobilize thousands of citizens to protest and prevent the construction of middle- and upper-class housing in a section of the city's

largest park (Campo Aberto, 2006). This park has recently been remodelled in a very innovative manner from the standpoint of urban and garden design, and it is much used by citizens. It is located in the western part of the city, near the coast and the upper-class residential areas. In a sharply significant contrast, no similar mobilizations were organized to defend another large green area in the eastern part of the city, one of the poorest. So, these events clearly point out the difficulties that ecological organizations face in the municipal area as a whole and the different and unbalanced dimensions of planning.

Not even these events managed to interrupt the slow but constant development of the master plan. At the beginning, planners argued that they consulted the authorities in each of the districts (freguesias or parishes) of the city. They also planned to consult all the associations and organizations belonging to the urban elite, although it was assumed that there was fluid communication between the associations and the Juntas de Freguesia ('Parish Councils'). However, the socialist party lost the local elections, and the incoming conservative party decided to modify the approach to the master plan. They started by cancelling all the forthcoming meetings. For these and other reasons, the planners' team in charge of the management and consultancy of the master plan decided to break off relations with the city council and the process continued only under the supervision of the council's own technicians. When the plan was first approved in 2004, no more than 300 suggestions were presented; their content, according to the new director, led to 'important modifications' in the approach and provisions of the plan. Despite the positive attitude of the new planners towards a very moderate and institutional form of participation, this only resulted in a small number of proposals motivated by individual interests and not the result of collective and in-depth debates. Therefore, I can conclude by verifying that the elaboration of the new master plan has generally not been the object of public debate. A few controversies regarding the plan were reduced to conflicts between the political parties and technicians (university professors, in this case) working for city council, as well as the aforementioned criticisms and mobilizations on specific issues by environmentalist organizations and public transport users.

Conclusions

As can be deduced, there are both similarities and significant differences between the two urban planning processes in Vigo and Porto. The citizen participation possible in both cases was determined more by the specific history of urban movements in each city and the political opportunities generated by different local factors in relation to planning, than by the influence of supra-local or global dynamics. Our analytical approach assumes that different forms of citizen participation exist in relation to urban planning (Alford and Friedland, 1985: 389) and that urban movements may be key social actors for the promotion of some of these forms based on autonomous initiatives (Mayer 1993; Pruijt, 2002; 2003). However, the political arena in which the movements, planners and local authorities interact is formed by many other social power relations that are often the main obstacle facing participative dynamics.

Vigo is a good example of how most urban elites (with the exception of one political party and one important newspaper, during the first long period of elaboration) joined forces in support of a master plan even when local government changed hands from left to right. The planners belonged to a private company but their headquarters were based in council offices and thus ensured complete coordination with both progressive and conservative governments. Most neighbourhood associations, retaining an influential strength from the transitional times due to their federation, also backed the plan and the urban elites from the beginning, but showed disagreements with the new socialist government during the last period. In Porto, the change of municipal government caused

a rupture with the external team of three professors supervising the work of municipal civil servants and personnel hired exclusively by the city council to define the plan. Significantly, even the initial planners ended up presenting their own critical suggestions and proposals on the first document when this was presented to the public.

As a result, I can verify how the technical elites were strongly conditioned by the political elite in both cities, albeit to different degrees due in this case to the types of private teams involved (an independent firm in Vigo and a mixed team of professors and municipal staff in Porto). This would confirm a classical elitist explanation (Harding, 1995), but taking into account the different levels and types of elites, and their specific ties to capitalist-oriented forms of local government (Pickvance, 1984). In order to assess the relevance of alternative or complementary explanations, it has yet to be clarified whether the political elites were subject to the economic elites and it is not clear exactly how this possible *subjection* is mediated by the planners and whether it could also be mediated by the urban movements. Summing up, both were confirmed. In Vigo I gathered evidence that shows that the meetings with business organizations, the conferences organized by these organizations and their presence in public media and in their own publications, created a discourse on the master plan that had a greater influence on planners and political parties than that of other professional organizations, neighbourhood associations and collectives that opposed the plan. In Porto, interviews with planners revealed the existence of several negotiations and agreements between planners, authorities and business organizations. However, their links with the master plan and its relevance were generally not visible to citizens.

An initial conclusion that may be drawn is, first, that these alliances between urban elites were important obstacles to citizen participation, and, second, that the actions of urban movements must have short-circuited the former to promote the latter. According to the descriptions presented, it is also interesting to note that the alliances between elites were not sufficiently effective time-wise in preparing the master plan: which took more than 5 years in each case. In both cities, bureaucratic obstacles blocked and delayed the elaboration and approval processes, regardless of the type of planning team involved. In Vigo, for example, different criteria between the municipal government and the supervisors of the autonomous-regional government (at supra-local level) caused serious delays in the process. Disputes between political parties were added impediments to fluent bureaucratic procedures in both cities, although in the case of Vigo there were also certain management difficulties caused by the very high number of individual and collective suggestions and amendments presented against the approved planning documents. We may, therefore, conclude that the dynamics of citizen participation has necessarily to deal with a series of disputes within the administrative authorities involved in the approval of the planning and the conflictive relations between the elite groups themselves.

The general plans in both cities show that citizen participation is, first and foremost, a challenge to the governability of cities, that is to say, to the performance of capabilities to govern in the context of different social interactions. Governability depends strongly on the alliances and conflicts between local elites, sometimes also including the managers and technicians of civic associations. It is therefore difficult to conceive participation as a set of neutral and deeply democratic governance rules and principles that may be superimposed on the network of social relations in any urban context. Hidden conflicts of local power (Lukes, 1974) influence strongly any participative design or implementation within the urban planning process. In the case of Vigo, I have mentioned that the planners implemented various participative mechanisms used by all types of social collectives. However, some collectives considered these to be insufficient and they legitimately aired their protests outside that institutional framework through alternative debate forums, legal appeals and also street demonstrations (according to police records, 32 demonstrations were organized to protest against the master plan during 2005 and 2006 alone). This example shows that participation demands may easily transcend the institutional channels envisaged by the authorities and the planners (as many scholars have argued: e.g. Villasante, 2006). Although the most radical opponents of the plan in Vigo failed to obtain support from most local citizens, their persistence and their demands for greater participation in the entire process undermined the legitimacy of the plan that was finally approved. In contrast, in Porto legitimacy was lost due to the secrecy and elitist control of the process, as well as to the failure of the limited participation actions that were top-down organized. The most innovative measure was an electronic forum on the municipal website, which, according to the director of the plan, was quickly eliminated because the technicians 'needed a lot of time to think about the most appropriate responses'. The most radical opposition to the plan was, in practice, limited to an environmentalist mobilization to protect a green area potentially threatened by the plan, rather than more ambitious attempts to promote a public debate on the plan as a whole (at least, following the minimum assumptions of the communicative approach encouraged by Healey and Forester).

The comparison of parameters suggested here also indicates that urban movements are important in the local context that conditions urban planning and the opportunities for citizen participation in the preparation of such plans. The strength of the urban movement in Vigo stemmed from their boom during the transition to democracy and their subsequent continuity thanks to coordination between neighbourhood associations — the main actors in the urban movement — and the centrality of some of them in the preservation of a community lifestyle in the semi-rural parts of the city. The concern for urban planning was just another one of their important public activities at the same time as they became involved, together with other associations and citizens, in different campaigns to defend public services or against threats and environmental catastrophes, and in strikes or demonstrations against the war in Iraq. However, their internal divisions concerning the plan increased the public conflict without a wide mobilization of citizen participation. In Porto much of the work of the neighbourhood associations has been assumed by the district authorities (Juntas de Freguesia) and has neutralized the associations' own grassroots and non-institutional initiatives. Nevertheless, the internal levels of municipal power restricted the scale of debates on the master plan enormously, confining them to district level. The associations of ecologists and users of the new metro network were the only ones able to express innovative concerns regarding, for example, the metropolitan area, but their impact in terms of citizen participation and urban planning has so far been very small and much less significant than in Vigo.

The citizen participation promoted by local authorities and urban planners, whenever explicit, tended to respond to a formal and institutional approach, basically limited to three legal periods of 'public audience' (analysis of the reality after consulting the population), 'collaboration' (explaining the first technical planning proposal and gathering suggestions that can improve it) and 'amendments' (the right to express legal claims against the provisions finally established in the approved plan). The urban movements have the capacity to extend this repertoire of participative actions, to express themselves through initiatives of their own outside institutional channels and to mobilize their bases and the population not affiliated to associative networks. This complex scenario contains, above all, a pool of votes that the political parties consider to be very sensitive; hence, politicians try to attract citizen organizations inside the institutions and, when available, their mechanisms of governance, consensus and partnership. Lastly, these general urban plans are processes in which elites and movements use their capacities to shape democratic practices, and at the same time take important decisions on the distribution of public goods in the medium and long term. All this belongs to the collective knowledge of the urban movements in the two cities studied. As already mentioned, their origins may be charted to the periods of transition to democracy — it is not, then, a matter of fast institutional designs within moderate frames of expression. However, the different ways in which urban movements have evolved in each city show that the preservation or loss of their strength depends mainly on their own merits for dealing with the conflicts relating to local governability.

The most paradoxical conclusion that may be drawn from this research is that the higher the level of participation, the more conflictive the interactions. This seems to contradict the recent discourses of governance that justify citizen participation on the basis of its contribution to consensus and to the negotiated resolution of power conflicts. In reality, participation and conflict can coexist before, during and after a specific planning process. What is a clear ideological illusion is to consider citizen participation as a 'democratic innovation' that may defuse social conflicts. The different social groups — urban elites and *individual* citizens included — with their respective material interests, historical experiences, capacities for social mobilization, public expressions and political ideologies and cultures will develop strategic relationships between them in the face of the emergence of any urban issue or plan. The decision to participate or not participate in or outside institutions is an option within these strategic interactions between urban actors (Marcuse, 2002).

Thus, the elite in Vigo decided to adopt a transparent approach to favour moderate citizen participation because they were aware of the strength of urban movements and the participative experiences accompanying the preparation of the master plan. And it was for the same reason that the elite in Porto decided not to jeopardize the fragile internal political and technical equilibrium by making concessions to the participation of other public organizations. In turn, each group of citizen organizations in Vigo used institutional resources, or their own resources when these were insufficient, to express their demands with respect to the master plan. In Porto, however, the few organizations concerned about the master plan mobilized society by calling a protest focusing solely on the issues that would generate sufficient interest to guarantee minimum citizen participation in the demonstrations. Almost none of the actors considered that participation was an end in itself. Sometimes participation brought an end to conflicts or disputes by channelling or concealing them; on other occasions it aggravated, multiplied or revealed such conflicts or disputes. What does seem clear in the light of this study is that the local contexts and histories of interactions between movements and authoritiesplanners established crucial conditions for these participative democratic developments that were more decisive than institutionally controlled mechanisms, or other external or supra-local factors.

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Resumé

L'urbanisation du territoire municipal reste un élément-clé de la politique de la ville malgré la concurrence d'autres types de planification spatiale et l'influence de programmes d'aménagement supra-locaux, comme ceux qui émanent des institutions européennes. Pour évaluer son importance, cette étude a choisi les deux derniers plans directeurs élaborés dans les villes de Vigo (Espagne) et de Porto (Portugal) afin d'analyser ce que les mouvements urbains ont apporté à la participation des habitants dans le cadre de ces plans. Les phases de transition vers la démocratie ont fait naître d'importants mouvements citoyens, ceux-ci évoluant différemment dans chacune des deux villes. Cet article décrit la transformation de ces mouvements et explique pourquoi ils mènent à un modèle participatif conflictuel dans le cas du plan directeur de Vigo, tandis que les possibilités de participation des habitants ont été neutralisées dans celui de Porto. En conclusion, cette comparaison révèle l'importance des contextes locaux de la gouvernementalité urbaine, celle-ci étant façonnée par l'historique des interactions stratégiques entre les élites et les mouvements urbains, ce qui module la validité des conceptions néolibérales de gouvernance dans leur explication de la participation des habitants en lien avec l'aménagement spatial.