DEBATING THE LOCAL TRANSITION: CONTESTED VISIONS OF DEMOCRATIZING MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT IN THE 1970S-1980S

El debate sobre la transición local: visiones controvertidas sobre la democratización del gobierno municipal en los años setenta y ochenta

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Abstract

This article contributes to the efforts to problematize the democratization of municipal government as a discrete phenomenon, rather than as a subset of the state-level process of transition. Not everyone agreed on the parameters of local democracy, and this article highlights the contested visions that were articulated by the major actors, including the citizen movement activists, the political parties and the federation of municipalities. It argues that there were features specific to the discourse on municipal democratization and that these constituted part of a fundamental ongoing debate in Spanish constitutional culture since the early 19th century. In broad terms, the field was divided between those who viewed municipal democratization as a secondary and subsidiary process that would be implemented from above and those who framed it as a distinct and constituent feature of a substantive democratization. Even though all parties formally rejected the old centralist model, in practice, the centralizing and municipalist traditions still shaped the terms of the debate.

Keywords

Transition; Democratization; Municipalism; Local Government.

Resumen

Este artículo contribuye a los esfuerzos por problematizar la democratización del gobierno municipal como un fenómeno discreto y no como un subconjunto del proceso de transición a nivel estatal. No todo el mundo estaba de acuerdo con los parámetros de la democracia local, y este artículo destaca las visiones controvertidas que articularon los principales actores, incluidos los activistas del movimiento ciudadano, los partidos políticos y la federación de municipios. En él se argumenta que el discurso sobre la democratización municipal tenía características específicas y que estas formaban parte de un debate fundamental en curso en la cultura constitucional española desde principios del siglo XIX. A grandes rasgos, el campo se dividió entre quienes veían la democratización municipal como un proceso secundario y subsidiario que se implementaría desde arriba y quienes la enmarcaban como un rasgo distinto y constitutivo de una democratización sustantiva. Aunque todos los partidos rechazaron formalmente el antiguo modelo centralista, en la práctica las tradiciones centralizadora y municipalista siguieron marcando los términos del debate.

Palabras clave

Transición; democratización; municipalismo; gobierno local.

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

The political transition of the 1970s and its aftermath is one of the most dynamic subjects in contemporary Spanish history, as evidenced by an outpouring of wide-ranging scholarship over the last several decades. One of the main avenues of research has been a critique of the "top down" explanatory framework that focused on a handful of national elites and institutions in favor of exploring a broader terrain of multiple actors and factors that shaped the process of democratization "from below". This broader terrain includes the territorial dimensions of the transition at the level of municipal government and autonomous communities. While the creation of the new federal structure of autonomous communities has received most of the attention, recently scholars have turned to the distinct process of transforming local governments. In other words, scholars have begun to problematize the democratization of municipal government as a discrete phenomenon, rather than as a subset of the state-level process.[1] Just as at the national level, local democratization occurred within a field of contestation, not as a pre-defined process, and following its own timetable that culminated in the mid-1980s with the local government laws of 1985 and 1988. Not everyone agreed on the parameters of local democracy, and this article highlights the contested visions that were articulated by the major actors, particularly the citizen movement activists, the political parties and the federation of municipalities.

[1] In terms of framing an agenda, Márquez Cruz (1997) was an early advocate for defining the "local transition" as an important theoretical concept from the perspective of institutional history. In this vein, I would also highlight Quirosa-Cheyrouze y Muñoz and Fernández Amador (2010: 23), which argues for incorporating what they call an important new element —the transformation of local power— into the "Transition" narrative. In English, see Ponce and Sánchez (2011), in which the authors also frame the local transitions as unexplored terrain.

It argues that there were features specific to the discourse on municipal democratization and that these constituted part of a long-standing debate in Spanish constitutional culture about the role of local government.

The contested place of local government in the modern Spanish Constitutional system has been a core theme in political debates since the early 19th century. Until recently, there were two competing frameworks that were defended by a range of political actors, especially at liminal moments. The dominant position, held by most of the ruling parties and leaders, viewed the local administration as an extension of the executive power of the state, a subordinate body in the hierarchical chain of command. The minority position has been the conviction that the local government is an autonomous governing body whose legitimacy derives from direct representation and participation of the community. More than an administrative and legal dispute, these opposing positions embodied distinct centralizing vs. municipalist visions of a constitutional and later democratic political community.[2]

Although often from the margins, municipalist ideas have played a consistent role in debates about the territorial structure of the liberal constitutional state, the nature of democracy and the virtues of federalism vs. centralism. On the level of practice, subaltern movements often took refuge in the local as an alternative site of mobilization and power as the majority political parties pursued centralized programs that denigrated local power as archaic and destabilizing. In other words, the local was both a de facto space of modern politics and the object of theorizing by a range of thinkers and movements from progressive liberals to democrats, republicans, anarchists and communists. The upshot has been a recurring pattern of counter-hegemonic municipalist discourse that has competed with statist and, from the end of the 19th century regionalist, discourses to define the complex terrain of modern Spanish political culture. Specifically, municipalist discourses have claimed an independent and fundamental role for local government in empowering and organizing communities.

The political transition of the 1970s exemplifies this longer pattern of resurgent debate in liminal periods. After various unsuccessful projects to empower local governments that spanned the latter decades of the Restoration, the Primo Dictatorship and the Second Republic, the Franco dictatorship

[2] See Radcliff (2024), for an extended version of this argument. I refer to municipalist ideas, discourse or imaginary as a way to identify a flexible but consistent group of concepts that did not cohere into a self-defined municipalist movement until the 20th century. For a comprehensive encyclopedic history of the role of the municipality in Spanish history from antiquity to the present, see Orduña Rebollo (2005).

imposed a version of the dominant paradigm of local administrative bodies tethered to strict State supervision. By the last decade of the regime, there was no better indictment of extreme centralization paired with authoritarian lack of accountability than the debilitated state of local administration, unable to meet the collective needs of the population in a rapidly transforming economy and society. As a result, fixing municipal government was already on the agenda by the 1970s.

When the formal transition process opened, all voices assumed that a solution involved democratization of municipal institutions. Moreover, after four decades of stifling centralization, the parameters of the debate had shifted, marking a definitive rupture. Thus, all major players now claimed to accept the general principles of local autonomy and decentralization. More broadly, territorial decentralization and autonomy would emerge as consensus concepts in the formulation of the territorial organization of the new democracy, embodied in constitutional guarantees of autonomy for each level of government as well as shifting public opinion.[3] In other words, during this political transition, tiers of territorial autonomy were framed as a constituent and fundamental feature of democracy, with the creation of the autonomous communities as the most prominent result. For municipal governments, while the general link between local autonomy and democratization formed a new common denominator, not everyone agreed on the parameters of a substantive local democracy and how it fit into the broader transition process. Thus, parallel to the national and regional levels, the local transitions unleashed a debate specific to the municipal sphere.

Confirming the distinct process, the local debate had its own drawn-out timetable. As one commentator wrote in a 1980 article, the transition in municipal governments "esté todavía de ida", at a point when the national "está ya de vuelta".[4] While the Constitution had guaranteed both local autonomy and elected city councils,[5] the local institutional transitions did not

[3] Article 137 CE, 1978: "El Estado se organiza territorialmente en municipios, en provincias y en las Comunidades Autónomas que se constituyan. Todas estas entidades gozan de autonomía para la gestión de sus respectivos intereses". Support for a centralized political system declined from 43% to 28% between 1976 and 1980 according to García Ferrando (1982:24).

[4] López Agudín (1980).

[5] Art 140 CE, 1978: "La Constitución garantiza la autonomía de los municipios. Estos gozarán de personalidad jurídica plena. Su gobierno y administración corresponde a sus respectivos Ayuntamientos, integrados por los Alcaldes y los Concejales. Los Concejales serán elegidos por los vecinos del municipio mediante sufragio universal,

officially begin until April 1979, with the first municipal elections for democratic city councils. They culminated in the mid to late 1980s, with the passage of the Ley de Bases de Régimen Local in 1985 and the corresponding Ley Reguladora de las Haciendas Locales in 1988, which established the structure and resources of municipal governments in the new democratic system.[6] Before 1979, Francoist city councils remained in place in most cases, while until 1985 democratically elected city governments still operated to some degree within legal frameworks established by the dictatorship. As a result, debates over the parameters of the local "transition" remained unresolved until the new legal codes were finalized. Even after that, calls for a "second transition" dominated discussion about local governance in the 1990s, culminating with the Pacto Local in 1999 and subsequent enhancement of the powers and resources of local governments, especially vis a vis autonomous communities.[7] In the second decade of the 21st century, a radical participatory version of municipalist demands resurged in the form of platforms re-claiming citizen ownership of local government as part of a broader campaign for popular empowerment vis a vis the elites.[8] In other words, the debate over the parameters of local democracy followed its own logic and timetable, building on a long tradition but adapting to new historical contexts.

At the same time, foregrounding local democratization as a core element of the Spanish transition joins what has been a broader trend in European democracy studies in recent decades. Until the 1970s, social scientists generally viewed local politics as a residual sphere, within a modernization paradigm that normalized the scaling up of the political center of gravity in the contemporary era.[9] This framework was reflected in the initial lack of attention to the local level in the first wave of political science scholarship on the democratic transitions of the 1970s, which developed models based on the elite construction of national structures. Since then, the "new localism", or the interest in local governments as important protagonists in constructing "levels" of democratic legitimacy and practices in both newly democratized and consolidated democratic states has grown dramatically in comparative

igual, libre, directo y secreto, en la forma establecida por la ley. Los Alcaldes serán elegidos por los Concejales o por los vecinos".

6 For a full narrative of this process, see Márquez Cruz (1997).

7 For details, see Arenilla Sáez y Canales Aliende (1999), and Agranoff (2010). For recent summaries, see the dossier on the evolution of local administration since 1979: Baño León and Alarcón Sotomayor (2019), and Harguindéguy y Ruiloba Nuñez (2023).

8 Subirats (2016), Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid (2014).

9 Caciagli (1997: 77-78). He notes the exception in the Anglo-Saxon literature.

European social science.[10] From within Spain, the editors of a 1997 volume situated the Spanish case within the new comparative framework, arguing that scholars should focus on the ongoing local evolution from administrative units to fully realized democratic governments that had begun with the national-level transition.[11] More recently, the radical democratic theory of the "new municipalism" has spawned an international movement based on the claim that democracy should be rescued and reimagined looking out and up from the local political sphere.[12] Incorporating both old and new democracies, these trends create a broad comparative canvas for the Spanish debates about the contours of democratic governance at the municipal level.

II. DEFINING THE PARAMETERS OF MUNICIPAL DEMOCRATIZATION: 1976-1979

When the national transition process began, there was broad consensus among all constituencies and groups that the authoritarian local government structure of the Franco regime had to be dismantled and replaced by democratic institutions, but the agreement ended there. Over the next several years until the first local elections, the major players engaged in implicit and explicit debates over the substance of local democratization and how it fit into the national and regional transition processes. In broad terms, the field was divided between those who viewed municipal democratization as a secondary and subsidiary process that would be implemented from above and those who framed it as a distinct and constituent feature of a substantive democratization. Even though all parties formally rejected the old centralist model, in practice, the former position mirrored the centralizing tradition of political reform implemented from above, while the latter echoed the municipalist tradition of building democracy from below.

This division emerged in the first dispute over the apparently technical question of scheduling local elections. Due to a series of decisions by the interim government, the launch of the local institutional transition was

[10] Goetz and Clark (1993). In the introduction, Susan Clark argued that most existing theories of democratic reform and regime change fail to incorporate the local sphere in their models of change (p. 6). On multi-level theorizing, see Hooghe and Marks (2003).

[11] Alba y Vanaclocha (1997). This appears to have been one of the first comparative volumes that originated in Spain, from the Universidad Carlos III.

[12] On the "new municipalism" in Europe, see Caccia (2017).

delayed several times. Prime Minister Adolfo Súarez, appointed by the King in July 1976 to lead an as yet undefined transition process, made an early decision in October of that year to delay imminently scheduled local elections until after the legislative ones the following spring. Opposition critics challenged the decision, evoking the precedent of the 1931 local elections that had launched the previous democratic transition to the Second Republic "from below". For conservatives, however, those elections constituted a cautionary tale about unleashing unanticipated consequences instead of implementing a centralized plan. With the elections delayed, opposition parties demanded an immediate local "rupture", arguing essentially that the democratization process could not begin until the old local governments had been removed. Communist leader and future Madrid city councilor Ramón Tamames argued that the city councils should be replaced by interim bodies representing the new political forces until an election could be organized.[13] More explicitly, the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP), led by future Madrid Mayor Tierno Galván, declared that "sin una vida local vigorosa y democrática no habrá democracia en España", and included demands for immediate financial, electoral and legal transformation of local governments.[14]

After the legislative elections, the new UCD government laid out its plan for an orderly local transition, but disagreement with the opposition groups and local activists continued around the timetable and terms of municipal elections.[15] The government submitted a draft of a local electoral law in November 1977, which was not finally approved until July of 1978 after vigorous debate. By that time, the government decided to further delay the local elections until after the referendum on the new Constitution at the end of that year, arguing that it would finalize a secure legal framework for the transfer of legitimacy. Observers debated whether the extended timetable was manipulative or pragmatic, but either way it revealed the government's vision for local democratization as a subsidiary and delegated process granted from above.

While the government's timetable prevailed, its logic was challenged by the citizen social movements and the opposition political parties. In fact, the delayed local elections had the unintended effect of generating more time and space for grassroots articulation of alternative visions of local democracy.

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13 Tamames (1984: 584). Cited in Quirosa Cheyrouze y Muñoz and Fernandez Amador (2010: 181).

14 Cited in Márquez Cruz (1997: 166). After disappointing electoral results in 1977, Galván and most PSP members were incorporated into the PSOE.

15 For details, see Quirosa Cherouze Muñoz and Fernández Amador (2010), capítulo 5, "Necesidad de democratizar los ayuntamientos".

Critical to launching the debate were the *asociaciones de vecinos* (AAVV) and other locally based associations, which highlighted the specific and urgent problems of authoritarianism at the local level.[16] In urban settings, these associations began by demanding decent housing, sewers, paved streets, schools and green spaces, especially in the burgeoning neighborhoods on the outskirts of major cities, but also in smaller provincial capitals and urban centers undergoing economic transformation. In rural municipalities, the struggles over access to public services had their own features and protagonists. Given the high rates of rural unemployment, the allocation of Community Employment subsidies by local councils, among other demands, provoked protests by emerging independent agricultural labor unions.[17] Whether rural or urban, the inability of Francoist city administrations to effectively provide these services had sparked the demand for civil society associations, which in turn put the transformation of "el poder local" at the center of their agenda. In other words, in addition to all the other roles played by the citizen movement during the transition, it was a key protagonist in framing a field of debate and contestation about the specific and urgent need for political transition in municipal government.[18]

Beyond simply arguing for a rupture of personnel, radical democratic theorists linked to the citizen movement articulated what they called an "alternativa democrática municipal" that contrasted with the top-down reform process of legitimacy granted from above.[19] Instead, they argued that true democratization should be a bottom-up process that began with the transformation of municipal power as the first point of rupture. In the words of sociologist Tomas R. Villasante in his influential first book: "Only by resolving this problem of power at the grass-roots level is it possible to imagine a new society".[20] This framework of bottom-up construction of the political

[16] Among many other works, see Radcliff (2011); Molinero y Ysas (2010); Pérez Quintana y Sánchez León (2008); Contreras Becerra (2018); Bordetas Jiménez (2012); Ofer (2017); Acebal (2015); and Davis (2014).

[17] Groves *et al*. (2017).

[18] Botella (1992) makes the point that the local transitions were shaped by two main factors: the AAVV and the financial crisis. In general, this specific feature of the AAVV discourse has not been the focus of analysis in most of the works, which have been more interested in exploring the role of social movements, their repertoires and their specific campaigns for urban improvements.

[19] Martí Terrades (1976) claims that the first manifesto with this title was issued in the town of Vic in the province of Barcelona in the spring of 1975. Other contemporary texts include: Borja *et al.* (1976); Ramírez (1977); Reventós (1976); Castells (1977a), and Rodríguez Villasante (1976).

[20] Rodríguez Villasante (1976:54).

community evoked familiar municipalist themes of local autonomy, citizen empowerment and decentralization of power. Instead of municipal governments being delegates of state power, their legitimacy and authority rested in the "soberanía del pueblo".[21] As another author put it, democratic local governments were the legal and institutional apparatus from which to begin the democratization of the rest of the state institutions.[22] For Villasante, these renovated municipal governments should then be given a direct voice in shaping the constitutional articles that would affect local governance, again moving from the local to the national as opposed to the other way around.[23]

In order to follow this script, the municipal governments that had operated according to private interests under the authoritarian regime had to become servants of the public, and more specifically of the neglected popular masses. Such a transformation required, on the one hand, power and resources to act, while on the other open channels of citizen participation to ensure benefits for all. The power to act stipulated decentralization of authority and budgets, which had been tightly restricted in the Francoist model. But in contrast to the limited understanding of decentralization as delegation from above, the democratic municipalities had to "conquer" the authority that would convert them into "decision-making centers".[24] First, each municipal government should be able to design their own *carta municipal*, following the general principle that they were not generic delegates of the State but organs charged with representing the particular interests of their communities to the State.[25] Second, within the range of their responsibilities, local government laws should be the ultimate authority, subject to oversight by the judicial system (and the citizens), not the State or the Civil Governor.[26] And finally, to fund these projects, municipalities would need the power to levy taxes and be allocated a greater share of State income. With these tools, democratic municipalities would be tasked with transforming the lived environment to benefit the collective interests of the masses through municipalization of services, urban planning, the social right to housing, public infrastructure, collective transport, public green spaces and even promotion of the social life of neighborhoods.[27]

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21 *Ibid*.:148).
22 González Casanova (1976: 30).
23 Rodríguez Villasante (1976: 66).
24 Reventós (1976: 18).
25 Rodríguez Villasante (1976: 64-69).
26 Ramírez (1977: capítulo 4).
27 Castells (1977a: 238).

If autonomy was essential for local government effectiveness, radical democratization required popular access to and participation in local institutions. More specifically, as one theorist explained, the democratization of local government was conceived as part of the struggle of the popular masses against the capitalist control of these bodies in the old regime.[28] Incorporated into left-wing visions of popular empowerment, local political institutions were framed as the most accessible site on which to build a radical or socialist democracy.[29] Officials would still be elected according to basic representative principles of universal suffrage, already a contrast to the appointment process of the Francoist corporations. But "representative democracy" had to be paired with what was defined as "direct democracy" or "democracia de base".[30] In the words of a Pamplona city council member in early 1977, "Si los ayuntamientos han de ser democráticos, no basta que sean elegidos por sufragio universal. Deberán además, y de forma creciente, aceptar y potenciar la acción ciudadana".[31] Thus, a substantive democratic practice required channels for non-elected citizens to be consulted, propose projects and provide oversight. Some proposals included: joint committees with citizens and elected officials, a requirement that city governments consult citizen organizations and discuss their ideas/proposals, the right for citizen initiatives on the ballot and, of course, open and transparent channels of communication to keep citizens informed. In the Pamplona case, a group of anti-Francoist city councilors had already gained control of the council before 1976, and they began holding general assemblies outside with a microphone, so that, in the words of the Mayor, "todo Pamplona sea Ayuntamiento".

In addition to general channels for popular input, the citizen movement itself was framed as a collective protagonist in the "alternativa democrática municipal". Thus, the AAVV and other locally-based associations were viewed as ideal conduits linking the private citizen with their community and the State at the level of municipal government. The exact relationship between citizen movement and governing institutions constituted part of the debate, but some version of interpenetration or collaboration was assumed. Indicative of the importance of the theme, one association announced the opening of a debate on the relationship between the associations and city government before taking any position.[32] In one version, the associations should remain

[28] Ramírez (1977: 17-20).

[29] Castells (1977a: 218).

[30] Borja (1984).

[31] From a plenary session of April 25, printed in *Diario de Navarra*, 26-4-1977. Cited in Pescador y Barcos (2011: 82).

[32] Boletín de la AV Mahadahonda, 3-1977.

completely autonomous, developing proposals and serving as watchdogs and consultants, while others advocated different forms of corporatist representation or participation. These claims first emerged from the associations themselves, as evident from the case of Madrid. Thus, the illegal provincial Federation of Neighborhood Associations had already included "direct participation of *vecinos* in municipal government through the associations" as one of their three demands in the clandestine issue of November 1975. Other versions of this demand appeared in various AAVV bulletins in Madrid; "each AV should collaborate in the election of municipal representatives"[33], and "we agree to collaborate to achieve the full democratic participation of *vecinos* in the municipal government".[34] For implementing participation, the AV Parque Aluche demanded "channels for our associations to take part" as a requirement of democratic municipalities,[35] and the AV Palomeras Altas proposed giving the AAVV formal representation in various municipal bodies.[36] Other formulations seemed to view the associations as parallel or replacement authorities, as in the claim that the association was the perfect "representative and democratic organism"[37]. Similarly, another platform defined their role as constructing "a citizen and democratic alternative for their district" based on their identity as "an organ of democracy, citizenship and popular control".[38]

Whatever its specific relationship with the representative institutions, the urban citizen movement as collective protagonist also played a role in the "new left" reconfiguration of socialist politics at a moment of crisis for the old "dictatorial and bureaucratic" version of socialism.[39] The working class and their unions still played a role in the anti-capitalist struggle, but the citizen movement and its urban setting opened a new front for Marxist social theorists. The most influential of these was Manuel Castells, who didn't abandon class struggle but framed the city as a "social product" that generated its own primary field of contestation. Within this field, the municipal government was both closest to the everyday power struggles and the branch of the state most permeable to the "dominated classes," he argued. On what he called the

[33] *Boletín de la AV La Paz*, 12-1975.
[34] *Boletín de la AV San Blas*, 6-1976.
[35] *Boletín de la AV Parque Aluche*, 2-76
[36] *Boletín de la AV Palomeras Altas*, 12-1979.
[37] *Boletín de la AV La Paz*, 12-1975.
[38] *Boletín de la AV Arganzuela*, 1-1977.
[39] From the introduction to the Colleció Alternativa, which was to be a series of books proposing alternative municipal programs: Reventós (1976: 6).

"democratic road to socialism," local government had become the "sala de espera" in a new strategy of transformation that began with territorially-based mechanisms of self-rule.[40] From a similarly socialist perspective, another author argued that municipal power was particularly tied to the problems of the popular classes and was thus an ideal tool in the struggle against capitalist interests.[41] Within this re-framed socialist narrative, the point of reference was usually contemporary Europe, as in one text highlighting the model of French municipal socialism.[42] Municipalist ideas were thus called upon to inject new life in a socialist narrative struggling to shed its state-centered "dictatorial" image. As Jordi Borja put it in a later publication, this decentralized authority would not only dismantle the remnants of the centralized structures of the Francoist dictatorship but would also discard the (socialist) left's own centralizing framework, which had in the past supported the concentration of power in the state and distrusted local power.[43] Thus it should be no surprise that one of the most vigorous defenders of the "alternativa democrática municipal" heading into the 1979 elections and beyond will be the PCE, the Communist party.

There was another minority strand of radical democratic municipalism, re-articulated by the small anarchist movement. In contrast to the Marxist left, municipalist framing was already part of the anarchist repertoire. During the Second Republic, the CNT had debated whether the municipio libre or the trade union would be the core unit of the future anarchist society, but in the last major congress of 1936, the members endorsed the complementarity of both structures, which organized different sectors of communal life. Thus, anarchists in the 1970s could claim, as did Luis Racionero, that they had a natural affinity with the barrio associations, given their long record defending autonomy, decentralization and self-direction.[44] They could also reasonably accuse the other left wing parties of trying to manipulate the Associations and transform them into servants of party politics. Instead, the anarchists felt they could offer an alternative to the Citizen Movement, informed by the perspective of *El Municipio Libre*, as articulated in the introductory editorial to a bulletin with that name, in April 1978. From the anti-statist perspective, the associations would displace the elected governments, as entities of direct democracy and self-direction (gestion) that would constitute the true *munic-*

40 Castells (1977a: 218).
41 Ramírez (1977: 17).
42 Reventós (1976: 19).
43 Borja (1987).
44 Racionero (1976).

ipio libre of the anarchist tradition. Despite the promises to democratize the municipal governments, from the anarchist perspective they remained part of the apparatus of the state, with powers delegated from above. Instead, the AAVV should be empowered with the direction of the municipality, beginning with neighborhood level assemblies, which would pass along their agreements to the Federation of AAVV at the municipal level. Given the marginal status of the anarchist movement, even within the left, this remained a minoritarian position. The majority accepted the need for a combination of formal governing and representative democratic institutions, operating in conjunction with "democracia de base" through the popular associations.

During the 1979 election campaign, the AAVV continued to intervene directly, lobbying for candidates to commit to concrete channels of participation and empowerment for the community associations, with the underlying concern that they would be pushed to the sidelines once formal democratic institutions were in place. In Barcelona, the Federation of AAVV (FAVB) sponsored public debates and invited candidates to share their views, particularly on citizen participation. A week before the election, they distributed a manifesto that included demands for an autonomous, decentralized and transparent government structure, and for the recognition of the AAVV as privileged interlocutors with rights to participate on commissions and in plenary debates.[45] In Madrid, the Federation issued a similar manifesto, asking for formal recognition of the associations and urging the candidates to go beyond vague support to define specific competencies and roles for them in the future local governments.[46]

III. THE 1979 ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND THE AFTERMATH

The local elections marked an important turning point in the debate over municipal democratization, because it forced the consolidating political parties to define their specific vision. The differences among parties were telling. Not surprisingly, of the major parties, the UCD had the least to say about its specific municipal vision beyond the assertion that the election was a fundamental step in democratic consolidation. The platform was a brief one-page document with seven points, including autonomy and decentralization, improving services and developing a new housing policy. It explained that the lack of details derived from the variety of needs across 8,000 local

[45] Acebal (2015: 313-315).
[46] García (1979).

governments, which precluded generalizations.[47] This disclaimer implied a narrow reading of municipalities as fixing problems, with little attention to problematizing its role as a participatory representative body. Thus, an article comparing the UCD platform with those of the other major parties noted that the only concrete proposal regarding citizen participation was to establish informational offices in each neighborhood that would accept suggestions from citizens.[48] Reading between the lines of the UCD's minimal program, the silence speaks volumes about the lack of a specific vision of municipal democratization as a distinct process beyond the totemic commitment to "autonomy and decentralization".

In contrast, the electoral manifestoes of the two major opposition parties, the PSOE and the PCE, both framed these elections as a foundational turning point in the transition. In the words of Madrid mayoral candidate Enrique Tierno Galván, the stakes could not be higher: "En esta campaña electoral nos jugamos el porvenir de toda España". On a rhetorical level, both parties adopted many of the general principles of the "alternativa democrática municipal". Both platforms began with the assumption that the local government was a representative institution that should have extensive policy initiative and control. They also agreed that the citizen movement would have some role in governance in the form of mixed commissions of AAVV, council members and professional staff. The PSOE platform promised to address a laundry list of themes, from transparency, anti-corruption, autonomy and decentralization to citizen participation, as well as more social services.[49] It focused special attention on the fiscal crisis of the municipalities and the need to create a more stable financial basis.

The PCE platform shared these general goals but provided a more detailed blueprint for implementation.[50] In a January 1979 party meeting in Madrid, the thrust of the PCE "municipal alternative" was defined as decentralization, participation and the promotion of community life. Manuel Castells argued that municipal governments were at the intersection between formal representative democracy and popular democracy ("de base"), and between democratic politics and daily life. According to Ramón Tamames, "la democracia pasa por esos 8,000 municipios, que (…) son la instancia más próxima del poder a la que todos deben tener acceso".[51] In particular, it was

47 *El País,* March 27, 1979.
48 *El País,* 1-4-1979.
49 *El País,* 18-3-1979.
50 *El País,* 1-4-1979.
51 PCE (1979).

only the PCE program that specified channels for direct democracy, such as the right for citizens to demand referenda on policies and to submit proposals of their own. It also insisted on increasing the internal democracy of the municipal government, criticizing the current "presidentialist" model of the powerful mayor, and advocating a shift in authority towards the plenary assembly.[52] Another example of internal decentralization in urban centers was to augment the powers of district juntas to decide on improvements to their neighborhoods, pending approval by the plenary assembly.[53] Finally, it also defined autonomy as a clear separation of spheres between the municipality and the state, with enumerated powers over raising taxes and management of urban services.

The parties with the most radical proposals for direct democracy in local governance were the smaller ultra-left parties, like the two splinter communist parties, the Liga Comunista Revolucionaria and the MC-OIC. The latter proposed the neighborhood election of district juntas, as did the PCE, but without oversight in the development of urban plans for their zone. The former supported the direct intervention of all organized social movements, or "movimientos de base" in the city council, as well as the municipalization of land, public services and education.[54] The ORT focused on parallel organs of direct democracy, from mixed commissions of citizens and officials to decentralization in neighborhood councils and general assemblies for smaller municipalities.[55] The radical Basque party, Herri Batasuna, amplified the concept of direct intervention by framing the social movements as a "contrapoder", a counterweight with the capacity to initiate and to veto city decisions.[56]

The link between autonomy, participation and democracy overlapped and intertwined with the language of the early regionalist/sub-national campaigns.[57] At this point, regionalist parties framed the local and regional levels of territorial autonomy as complementary, part and parcel of a broader demand for decentralization of power and democratization. For example, at a rally in Guernica with 2,000 local government candidates, the Basque Nationalist party, the PNV, asserted its twin commitment to the autonomy statute and the municipalist tradition of the region.[58] More than a parallel

52 Castells (1977b).
53 *El País,* 1-4-1979.
54 *El País,* 11-3-1979.
55 O.R.T. (1978).
56 *El País,* 23-3-1979.
57 Herrera González de Molina y Acosta Ramírez (2023).
58 Quirosa Cheyrouze y Muñoz (2010: 288).

project, municipal autonomy was often framed as a stepping stone towards regional autonomy. Thus, the Partido Socialista Andaluz claimed municipal democratization "como un paso decisorio en la lucha del Pueblo andaluz por su autonomía", and "Construyamos Andalucía con ayuntamientos andalucistas".[59] In his proposal for democratic and Valencian local governments, Just Ramirez argued that the creation of socialist democratic local governments would contribute to Valencian autonomy.[60] For the Catalan case, Martí Terrades makes the case that the struggle for municipal autonomy had a special resonance and vibrancy in that region as part of the broader anti-centralist sentiment.[61] Local parties in Catalonia could draw on the 1934 Ley Municipal de Catalunya, which had already included popular initiative and consultation as well as the right of recall.[62] All of these frameworks declared the conviction that constructing regional autonomy required a foundation of autonomous municipalities.

Beyond the platforms that foregrounded the transformation of local government, the elections brought these ideas into every municipality in the country, disseminated in local campaigns.[63] Local newspapers were key conduits, and not only in the cities. In the mid-sized town of Osuna (Granada), a new newspaper, *El Paleto*, was founded in 1979 to provide citizens with transparent information about local public affairs.[64] In Albacete, the local newspaper, *La Verdad de Albacete,* publicized the election debates with articles that articulated the AAVV defense of a democratic local government defined by collective participation and direct democracy, as well as the PCE and PSOE platforms that embraced this model.[65] In Granada, the Andalucian Socialist party (PSA) based its platform on municipal autonomy to manage local issues, in contrast to Francoist centralism, along with elected district representatives, AAVV participation and a reduction of the "presidentialist" power of the Mayor. The Communist mayoral candidate shared these positions but added more specifics, like the right of the AAVV to participate in the municipal assembly sessions, the municipalization of services and a Carta municipal. In contrast, the UCD candidate defended Mayoral authority, made no reference

59 Herrera y Claudin (1978: 298-301).

60 Ramírez (1977: 15).

61 Martí Terradés (1976).

62 Subirats y Vallés (1990: 48).

63 Quirosa-Cheyrouze, y Muñoz (2009).

64 It was founded by a group of young people with no specific affiliation. Osuna had 15,000 residents. Groves *et al.* (2017: 111).

65 González Madrid (2016: 67-68).

to citizen participation and focused on the need to improve efficacy of administration and finances.[66] The Valencian municipal election was complicated by internal divisions within the Socialist party, which represented a fusion of more moderate vs. Marxist factions, but the program included the full range of decentralization, autonomy and participation, including advisory commissions of AAVV and district mayors for the neighborhoods.[67]

The final stage of the election process was the formation of new local administrations, which included about 2,000 municipalities with an opposition majority that had campaigned on the "alternativa democratica municipal". Most of them were Socialist but also included Regional Nationalist parties, particularly in the Basque Country. Although this represented about a quarter of the total number, three fourths of the Spanish population resided in them.[68] A post-electoral pact between the PSOE and the PCE[69] cemented left-wing majorities and mayoral posts in several hundred municipalities, notably in a majority of cities and provincial capitals, but including smaller towns as well. PSOE leader Alfonso Guerra introduced the pact as a new era of "intensa cooperación en todo lo concerniente a la elaboración de leyes que afecten a la vida local".[70]

The specter of left-wing governments for the first time since the 1930s was incorporated into the discourse about local democratization, with the new Communist/Socialist governments framed as either an important contribution or a threat to democratization. The UCD and more conservative parties called the result a threat to democratic stability, drawing on language from the Republic to sow fear and uncertainty about what they called the new "frente-populismo." In contrast, leaders of both the PSOE and the PCE defended the democratic legitimacy of such an alliance and declared their commitment to "democratic and progressive" city governments, and threatened to activate

66 Villa García (2004: 119-128).

67 Colomer Rubio (2017: 192).

68 Grijelmo (1996: 374).

69 *El País,* 6-4-1979. The first meeting of delegates from each party met on April 4th to create a commission to draw up a common program, which included obtaining financial autonomy, solving urgent municipal issues, decentralization of functions and decentralization vis a vis districts, along with empowering citizen participation.

70 *El País,* 19-4-1979. The total distribution of votes in the 50 capitals was 32% for the PSOE, 31.8% for the UCD and 13% for the PCE. The PSOE had the most votes in 10, the UCD in 35 and the PCE in 1. Quirosa-Cheyrouze, y Muñoz, Rafael and Fernández Amador (2010: 303). In smaller municipalities, Osuna with 15,000 residents and Carcabuey with 3,000 both elected PSOE majorities in 1979. Groves *et al.* (2017: 110).

citizen mobilization if the government tried to block their inauguration.[71] At the local level, the Communist Mayor of Córdoba, Julio Anguita, later remembered that it took a while to quiet fears that he was going to launch a revolution, but he was still called "el califa rojo", a moniker that implied autocratic sultanism.[72] At the inauguration in Madrid, the UCD councilors complained that the pact was undemocratic, since it had given the PSOE and PCE a majority to vote for a Socialist Mayor, when the UCD candidate had received the most popular votes. Article 140 of the Constitution offered a choice between direct election of the Mayor by the voters or nomination by the city council, so the act was fully constitutional. The accusation of "undemocratic" fit the rhetorical strategy of undermining the democratic legitimacy of left-wing local governments. The candidate followed up with a speech condemning the "pacto marxista", which, he grumbled, revealed the PSOE's true colors as revolutionaries, not social democrats as they claimed.[73]

Not surprisingly, most of the opposition viewed the new left-wing governments as an important win for democracy. On the most basic level, having different parties in power at the local and national level was a sign of healthy pluralism and a first step in democratic consolidation. At the same time, the left parties could gain "apprenticeship" in governing and provide a counterweight, along with the future autonomous governments, to the concentration of authority at the center.[74] Many went further to celebrate what they viewed as "la primera ruptura verdadera respecto al pasado", after the disappointing evolutionary process at the national level.[75] Popular celebrations marked the constitution of new left-wing municipal governments, which included positive references of continuity with the 1930s. In Granada, Anguita was presented as re-establishing "la legalidad democrática interumpida en 1936", while the Barcelona Mayor, the Socialist Narcis Serra, referred to the two Republican mayors of the 1930s as his honored predecessors. In Madrid, the convocation was attended by national PSOE and PCE leaders, with hundreds in attendance as Galván and Tamames spoke from the balcony.[76] In Córdoba, Anguita remembered this turning point as "un momento casi renacentista" for many Spanish cities.[77]

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71 *El País,* 19-4-1979.

72 Espada (1996: 380-381).

73 *El País,* 20-4-1979.

74 An editorial entitled "Los límites del poder", *El País,* 4-4-1979.

75 Haro Tecglen (1979).

76 *El País,* 4-4-1979.

77 Espada (1996: 382).

Beyond the election, the national PCE invested significant resources in continuing the push for an "alternativa democratica municipal". In particular, the party established a section of "Política municipal y movimiento ciudadano", which included theorists Manuel Castells and Jordi Borja, and which was meant to offer information and advice to newly elected municipal government officials of the party and bridge the new gap with citizen movements.[78] The section also sought to organize a coordinated intervention into the debate over the future local government law, which would resolve the current tension between popularly elected city governments and the Francoist structure of centralization. As Jordi Borja put it, the discussion of the future regimen should be a "grand debate over the nature of the democracy".[79] As part of the push for a broad discussion of the parameters of a still-undefined local government law, in March 1981 the PCE organized the I Encuentro de Alcaldes, Concejales y Dirigentes del Movimiento Ciudadano, with 500 representatives in attendance.[80] The party drew up a formal proposal shortly thereafter, which spelled out the details of its positions. The blueprint not only called for eliminating hierarchy in the relationship between the local and other levels of government, but insisted on further democratization within the local governments, reducing the power of the Mayor, increasing the legislative authority of the city council and constituting neighborhood-level committees in larger cities.[81]

The degree to which these visions were translated into practice is another matter. Formal participation of the associations never materialized, and many activists complained they were abandoned by elected officials more concerned with shoring up political parties, a process that had already begun after the first legislative elections in 1977.[82] From this most critical perspective, the "disenchantment" that followed the transition on the local level was provoked by the behavior of the left in power, not the right.[83] In addition, the rosy promise of a new era of cooperation between the PSOE and the PCE did not always pan out. A revealing PCE report from 1980 complained that in the city councils where the PCE shared power with the PSOE, the Socialist party was invested in protecting mayoral authority, institutions and representative

78 See the publication PCE (1979-1980).

79 PCE (1979-1980*: 7*-1980).

80 Informe, 29-3-1981 (PCE Archive).

81 Ley de Régimen Local, PCE Comisión de Propaganda, 1981 (PCE Archive)

82 Bordetas Jiménez (2010: 71) argues that 1977, not 1979, was the most important turning point in shifting the balance of power between the parties and the associations.

83 López Agudín (1980: 71).

bodies, in contrast to the PCE's desire to promote popular participation, or "democracia de base".[84]

More challenging for the vision of direct participation of citizen associations was the shifting relationship between civil society and formal institutions.[85] On a basic level, many activists were recruited as individuals into the new municipal corporations, either as candidates or as employees, enticed by the potential to transform the system from the inside. On the positive side, this influx created a core group in the municipal governments who had received their political formation in the citizen movement and absorbed its priorities.[86] On the negative side, the citizen movement lost many of its most capable leaders.[87] But it had also lost its original mission of challenging unresponsive authoritarian governments. To stay relevant, the citizen movement had to pivot, acting as a civil society counterweight to the formal political sphere and keeping pressure on elected officials to deliver on their promises. But the associations were far from unified, at times riven internally by party affiliations and rivalries. Through some combination of internal divisions and frustration at being marginalized, but also optimism that it was time to pass the torch to the new democratic administrations, the local elections initiated the gradual eclipse of the autonomous associations and the radical participatory vision of direct democracy. At the same time, the debate over the parameters of local democracy continued, but with a new set of protagonists, the newly constituted municipal governments.

IV. A NEW PHASE OF DEBATE; THE FEDERACION ESPAÑOLA DE MUNICIPIOS AND THE LEY DE BASES DE REGIMEN LOCAL

After the elections, the new democratic local administrations would take the lead in advocating for a municipalist vision that included decentralization and local autonomy, but without the radical participatory element of the

[84] Jordi Borja, "Política municipal: la izquierda ha cumplido un año," in: PCE (1979-1980: 12). The same complaint was made in issue 4 (Oct 1979).

[85] For the debate over "demobilization" of the citizen movement, see Quirosa Cheyrouze y Muñoz y Fernández Amador, Ch 8, "Los nuevos ayuntamientos" (2010: 358-373). For a more critical perspective, see López Agudín (1980). See also Radcliff, "The demobilization of the citizen movement," (2011: 323-331), for a discussion of various factors that contributed to the demobilization.

[86] Botella (1992: 148).

[87] González Madrid (2016: 70).

"alternativa democrática municipal". The Constitution had already taken the first step to define the local administration as an integral part of the organization of the Spanish state, with the guarantee of autonomy and the resources to carry out their functions. But without a concrete legal framework that spelled out its competencies and funding sources, this promise meant little in practice, especially in the context of the establishment of a new tier of autonomous communities. Until then, the elected city councils of whatever political complexion faced a mound of debt, limited resources and few defined powers. With these limitations, the 8,000 newly elected municipal governments faced the challenge of the next phase of democratization, which was bringing the full range of civil, political and social democratic rights to local communities from rural villages to urban metropolises.[88] At a time when the national conversation about decentralization was focused on carving out space for the new autonomous governments, it was left to municipal officials to keep the local claims to power sharing in the conversation.[89] It was this challenge that spurred the new municipal governments to play an active role in the ensuing debate that culminated with the Ley de Bases de Régimen Local in 1985 and the corresponding Ley Reguladora de las Haciendas Locales in 1988, finally bringing to a close what will be viewed later as the "first" local transition.

Representing the municipalities in this debate was newly formed Federación Española de Municipios (FEM). It was constituted in a June 1981 assembly, with 1,492 municipalities represented and the goal to constitute a united voice to negotiate with the central government on solving local problems. The Federation also aimed to form horizontal links to its European counterparts, through the Sección Española del Consejo de Municipios y Regiones de Europa (CMRE), whose Secretary General was in attendance at the 1981 assembly. One of the tasks identified in this first assembly was forming a commission to articulate and defend their positions in parliamentary discussion about the future Régimen local.[90] To enhance the legitimacy of their voice, the Federation successfully lobbied for explicit legalization of autonomous associations formed by local government entities, which was included in the 1985 Régimen.[91] Significantly, this was precisely the official

88 Herrera González de Molina makes this point (2012).

89 Agranoff (2010:246) argues there wasn't much support for local democracy beyond local government officials.

90 *El País,* 14-6-1981.

91 Márquez Cruz (1997: 171) makes the point about debates being focused on establishing the new autonomous governments between 1980-1983. The relevant articles

status requested and denied for the AAVV in the Constitution, highlighting the progressive institutionalization and professionalization of the consolidation process.

At the same time, there was already a history of municipal government employees advocating for autonomy and decentralization, interrupted by the Franco dictatorship. As part of a broader movement of "inter-municipalism" that emerged in the early 20th century, the Unión Municipal Española was constituted in 1925, represented 1,500 municipal governments in Spain and participated in the Congrés International des Villes in the 1920s and 1930s.[92] The Unión intervened in the debates over the Estatuto Municipal (the local government law proposed during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship), and again in the Second Republic debates over the republican version of a municipal government law.[93] At that time, the Unión hosted the Seventh National Municipalist Congress in August 1934 to propose amendments. In addition to measures to provide more financial independence, the Congress declared its support for the principle of municipal sovereignty, which meant that city council decisions should not be revoked by the central government.[94] The UME was disbanded by the Franco regime, replaced by the Instituto de Estudios de Administración Local, an appointed body tasked with research and advising the central government on issues of local administration.

Despite its top-down origins, the Instituto maintained a degree of continuity and advocacy through a series of academic publications on municipal administration, reform, documentation, history, law and regulations. During the Transition, the Instituto initiated a new series entitled "Administración y Ciudadano," which sought to educate citizens on the protagonism of municipalities in Spanish history and the unfinished task of reform.[95] For example, two 1979 volumes collected (for the first time, according to the editors) all the municipalist writings of two prominent reformist politicians from the

of the Régimen are 117 and 120.

92 Orduña Rebollo (2006:333). The autor cites a 1938 text by Ruy de Lugo Viña, *La intermunicipalidad,* La Habana.

93 Unión de Municipios Españoles, *Ponencias de la misma para el congreso extraordinario convocado para el estudio de bases de la futura ley Municipal* (Madrid: Artes Gráficas Municipales, 1931).

94 The recommendations of the Congress were included in the August 1934 issue of *El Municipio Español,* the official organ of the UME.

95 Some of the relevant titles include: Santayana Bustillo (1979); Vizcaíno Pérez y Miguel Sánchez (1979); Sacristán y Martínez y Guilarte (1981); Hill (1980); Ortiz de Zuñiga (1978), and García Fernández (1984).

Restoration period, Gumersindo de Azcárate and Adolfo Posada.[96] In the introductions to both books, the editors, each local historians in their own right,[97] argued for the relevance of these ideas in the current debate, and expressed the hope that local government would finally lose the status as the "poor relation" in Spanish governance that it had held since the Cortes of Cádiz. They also expressed concern that, despite the importance of the issue, none of the major political groups had made autonomous and democratic local government a prominent part of their platform.[98]

The new association was constituted to take on this advocacy role. It originated with a group of mayors convoked by Enrique Tierno Galván in Madrid in January 1980, and was formalized a few months later as a federation.[99] At the first assembly in June 1981, the executive commission was constituted with representation from all the political parties, with the Socialist Mayor of Málaga as the President and the UCD Mayor of Toledo as one of the vice presidents.[100] Soon after, the federation added "provinces", thus becoming the FEMP. From July 1981, the FEMP received informal recognition from the government by being added as a consulting member of the Comisión Nacional de Colaboración del Estado con la Administración Local. By 1996, 5,354 municipalities and 37 of 38 Diputaciones Provinciales were members, which encompassed 90% of the population.[101]

Over the next few years, the FEMP participated actively in the constitution of the 1985 municipal code, commenting on drafts, submitting amendments and lobbying for urgent approval. By the summer of 1984, they had begun to work on the finance law, in expectation of the first government draft in May 1985.[102] In 1983, the commission assigned to the first task submitted a document outlining its priorities for the Ley de Bases de Régimen Local and continued to comment on subsequent drafts over the next year, as well as to request input from individual municipalities.[103]

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96 Azcárate (1979) and Posada (1979).

97 Orduña Rebollo (2005) and Díez González (1967).

98 Florentino-Agustín Díez González, Estudio Preliminar to Adolfo Posada, *Escritos municipalistas,* p.14.

99 Márquez Cruz (1997: 171).

100 *El País,* 14-6-1981.

101 Márquez Cruz (1997: 172).

102 *Boletín de la FEMP*, núm. 6 (7-1984).

103 *Boletín,* núm. 0 (12-1983). The document was titled "Principios de la ley por la que se regularán las Bases del Régimen local", to be submitted to the Comisión Nacional

At the core of FEMP's priorities was the classic vision of an autonomous municipal government that drew its legitimacy from below. Thus, the FEMP reasserted the longstanding claim that the municipality was "una institución fundamental del Estado y no un simple órgano gestor de determinadas funciones".[104] From this point of departure, many of the specific items boiled down to defining a clear terrain of full municipal governing autonomy for the local "state" without tutelage from the Comunidad Autónoma or the central government. For example, under the clause defining "competencias propias", they suggested cutting the qualifying phrase "coordinado del Estado y de las Comunidades Autónomas". More broadly, they rejected the tutelage of both of these entities over municipal planning decisions, which should be definitive.[105] Instead, the municipal "estado" should be the "gestor ordinario" that oversaw all functions within the local sphere of governance. Finally, they vigorously rejected the article that granted the Comunidad Autónoma the right to dissolve a municipality, "una Institución, la más antigua de las que constituyen el Estado y anterior en el tiempo a la constitución del Estado mismo".[106] This framing of the municipality as the foundational and original political unit of society articulated the concept of a nation state constructed from below, in contrast to the "delegation" or "decentralization" of authority from above.

At the same time, this municipalist vision reconnected with the horizontal Europeanist dimension of transnational municipal networks that the UME had joined in the 1920s. The FEMP was eager to join the Consejo de Municipios y Regiones de Europa (CMRE), the post-war organization founded in 1951 by a group of Mayors to promote "la defensa de la autonomía local y el fortalecimiento de la unidad europea". The 1981 General Assembly of the CMRE was held in Madrid to celebrate the constitution of the Spanish section, and at the 1984 Assembly in Turin, the FEMP President led a delegation of 80 Spanish municipalities. For the future Berlin Assembly in 1986, one of the FEMP Vice Presidents was elected to the executive board of the CMRE.[107] Finally, the FEMP also sent a Spanish delegation to the XI Congreso de la Federación Mundial de Ciudades Unidas to Montreal in September 1984, with talks by the Mayors of Madrid, Toledo and Hospitalet

de Colaboración del Estado con la Administración Local. The request for feedback was in núm 2 (3- 1984).

104 *Boletín,* núm. 10 (12-1984).

105 *Boletín,* núm. 2 (3-1984).

106 *Boletín,* núm. 5 (5-1984).

107 *Boletín,* núm. 4 (4-1984).

on the subjects of "participación ciudadana y descentralización", among others.[108] The FEMP hoped to leverage these connections to pressure the Spanish government to include a reference to the Carta Europea de la Autonomía Local y Regional de Europa in the preamble to its Régimen de Bases Local.[109] Thus, the FEMP drew on both Spanish and European sources of legitimation in lobbying for its expansive vision of autonomous municipal government.

With the passage of the 1985 and 1988 local government laws, this first phase of the local transition came to a close, both in discursive and institutional terms.[110] On paper, the legal framework incorporated many of the basic municipalist principles that had been part of Spanish constitutional culture from the beginning. Indeed, the Preamble of the 1985 law claimed to mark a rupture, finally resolving the long history of oppressive centralization and various failed efforts at reforming local government, which had led to "una prolongada, creciente y devastadora frustración".[111] At long last, it concludes, "El advenimiento del Estado democrático y autonómico exige consolidar de forma definitiva unas instituciones locales capaces de responsabilizarse de sus propios intereses y vivificadoras de todo el tejido del Estado". Article 1 went on to declare that "Los Municipios son entidades básicas de la organización territorial del Estado y cauces inmediatos de participación ciudadana", while Article 2 reiterated the Constitution's guarantee of autonomy for municipal government.[112] In sum, citizen participation, autonomous governing authority and acknowledgement of the central role of municipalities in Spanish history and society all played a key role in framing the law.

At the same time, the implementation of these principles did not meet all the expectations of either the FEMP or the citizens. There was still a gap between the high expectations of residents and the limited financial and decision-making capacity of municipal governments, even after 1988. This ongoing gap would help fuel the calls for a "second transition" in the 1990s, leading to future campaigns and reforms, from the Pacto local of the 1990s to the municipalist platforms of the 21st century.

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108 *Boletín,* núm. 6 (7-1984).

109 *Boletín,* núm 4 (4-1984).

110 For the details of both laws, see Orduña Rebollo (2005: 238-245).

111 The historical narrative of the preamble was written by Benjamín González Alonso, catedrática de Historia del Derecho. The introduction to the philosophy of the law was written by Luciano Parejo Alfonso, catedrática de Derecho Administrativo (*ibid*.: 239).

112 Ley 7/1985, de 2 de abril, Reguladora de las Bases del Régimen Local.

V. CONCLUSION

This article has made the case for a specific debate over the parameters of municipal democracy that framed the local transition. The local transition followed its own timetable, surging into the public sphere with the opening of the reform process in 1976, peaking during the 1979 elections and finally concluding with the 1985 and 1988 laws. More importantly, it constituted its own field of contestation within the larger process. Thus, the local debate was not simply a miniature version of the national one. It contained elements specific to the role of municipalities in the constitution of a substantive democratic state and society which had been under discussion since the early 19th century. On one side, the interim and UCD governments clearly viewed democratization as a thrust outward from the center to the peripheries. The delay in finalizing the place of municipal government in the new federal system signaled the priorities of national elites, for whom it was the last and presumably least important piece of the puzzle. The treatment of the local transitions as an afterthought rather than a foundational element of democratization was also consistent with the broader theoretical and comparative political science frameworks that were circulating in the 1970s and 1980s. The "transitology" scholars confirmed that the safest path of democratization was a tightly controlled process managed and implemented by a handful of political elites who would write the new Constitution and establish the rules of the game, and they interpreted the "model" Spanish transition through this lens, ignoring or downplaying other elements.

Challenging this model was a municipalist version that viewed local government as the starting point of the democratization process, rooted in the fundamental relationship between citizens and their government at their entry point into public and community life. Defended by locally based associations, political party platforms and later municipal officials, this version demanded substantive autonomy and citizen participation in the organization of community life through municipal governments as the cornerstone of a democratic system. Furthermore, this vision was situated within a longer tradition of claims that began in the 1812 Constitutional debates and reappeared in nearly every moment of political transition over the course of the next two centuries. The resurgence of these claims during the major institutional transition of the 1970s confirmed municipalism's role as a consistent if minoritarian language of democracy in Spanish modern constitutional culture. At the same time, the Spanish case prefigured what would become the "local turn" in democracy studies, more recently confirmed by the "new municipalism", all of which suggest a broader contemporary relevance. In this

context, the re-framing of the transition as a municipalist moment provides a revised version of the now defunct Spanish "model", contributing to a new generation of debates in the theory and practice of democratic quality and legitimacy.

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