9

Spain
Empowering Communities

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Introduction   1

To many people, Spain is the country of the Reconquista, the Inquisition, Columbus' discovery of America in 1492, the disaster with the Armada in 1588, or of beaches, wine and sun. In this chapter, we will narrow down the focus to developments which affect local democracy in Spain. During our research we discovered that the awareness of Spain's twentieth century history has its effect on the way people deal with local democracy. We will therefore briefly discuss the Civil War, the Franco era and the rise of democracy.

Historical background   1.1

In July 1936, part of the Spanish army rose in revolt against the government of the Republic. The rebels failed to take over power and a cruel and bloody civil war began. The Spanish Civil War became the symbol of the fight against fascism. Franco and his fascist regime received help from Germany and Italy, whereas European communists and anarchists supported the Republic. After his victory in the Civil War general Franco ruled Spain as a dictator till 1975. He governed Spain with a strong hand, enforcing cruel repression of his enemies, and had the final word in every important political decision.

After Franco's death, Spain transformed remarkably fast from the dictatorial regime into a pluralistic parliamentary democracy. In the past, Franco had hand-picked the royal prince Juan Carlos and overseen his education. Juan Carlos had sworn loyalty to the principles of Franco's National Movement and he was vague about democracy. When he became King of Spain in November 1975, there was little reason to expect him one day to become king of a democratic country. The future of the Spanish state was unclear. Would it continue as an undemocratic country? Or could Juan Carlos' succession form a turning point of historical importance? The latter soon appeared to be the case: the new king wanted a transition to democracy. In 1976 the government declared a partial amnesty for some 400 political prisoners. In the same year Prime Minister Suárez announced a programme of political reform to introduce, for instance, universal suffrage and a two-chamber parliament: the Cortes Generales. Another task was to draw up a new constitution. In 1977 the first free elections since the Civil War were held after political parties had been legalised.

The transition to democracy was accompanied by other difficulties, such as an economic crisis and problems with the Basques. In spite of these setbacks Juan Carlos, with the aid of many Spanish people, succeeded to establish a democratic society.

Democracy at the national level   1.2

Today, Spain is a parliamentary monarchy. The Cortes Generales are the most powerful state institution. It consists is of a lower chamber, the Congress of Deputies, and an upper chamber, the Senate. According to the Constitution, the Congress of Deputies may comprise between 300 and 400 members - although electoral laws have set the norm at 350 deputies - elected by proportional representation every four years, unless parliament is dissolved before term. The Senate consists of 208 directly elected members and regional representatives, who are also chosen every four years. The hereditary king is not the sovereign, state power lies with both the parliament and the government. The King signs and promulgates laws that have been prepared by the government. He appoints the Prime Minister, signs decrees issued by the Council of Ministers, and ratifies civil and military appointments. The King has the title of supreme commander of the armed forces. He has a vital role as Spain's representative in international affairs, but it is clear that the duties he performs bear a neutral and a-political character.

About the research 1.3

Interviews were conducted in two Spanish cities: Alcobendas and Córdoba.

Alcobendas is a rich municipality and a 'dormitorio', a suburb of Madrid. The socialist party (PSOE) won the last municipal elections - according to the alderman we interviewed, this was due to the party's 'proximity'. The PSOE follows a polity of 'open doors': citizens are always welcome, there are 'complaint sheets', and letters receive a quick answer. Alcobendas' budget per capita is the third highest in the country. The local authority aims to provide jobs for the people in the city itself, to create a city identity and let people live together: many inhabitants came originally from other parts of Spain and recently immigrants have been settling in the city as well. Since the late nineteen seventies, Alcobendas has grown from 60,000 to 100,000 inhabitants, who are divided over seven neighbourhoods.

The Andalusian city of Córdoba, on the other hand, is one of the poorest in the country. In the informal economy, however, Córdoba is the biggest producer of gold and silver. The city is a crossroads of infrastructure. It has many tourist attractions and some 300,000 inhabitants, of which no more than 300 are immigrants (out of 2,337 immigrants in the province of Córdoba). Since the first democratic elections in 1979, the Communist Party and United Left (of which party the Communist Part is part) have governed Córdoba, although their reign was interrupted in the period 1995-1999. At this moment, a coalition of United Left and PSOE governs the city.

Local government in Spain 2

State tradition and system of sub-national government 2.1

Characterising Spain in terms of the four state traditions formulated by Loughlin and Peters (1997; see chapter 1) is a tricky task. Spain traditionally belonged to the French tradition, nowadays, at least in the opinion of Loughlin and Peters, an increasing number of Germanic elements can be observed in Spanish sub-national government. In our interviews, some doubts were raised about the latter; according to our Spanish colleague Ruano, Spanish local government still has strong French features, especially the smaller municipalities (of which there are many).

From a highly centralised system with two government tiers (central and local) of the authoritarian Franco regime, Spain has changed into a three-tier democratic system with central, regional and local government. The local tier of government consists of provinces, Comarcas, municipalities, Isles, and small local administrations.[2]

According to the OECD (1997) Spanish decentralisation effort has to be considered successful. Some major goals have been achieved: the transformation of an autocratic state into a democracy and the continuation of national unity. At the same time, democracy has been brought closer to the citizen by the establishment of democratically elected governments at the regional and local levels. Responsiveness to the citizen has been favoured by the improved proximity of government (OECD 1997).

Regional tier: autonomous communities   2.2

"Over the last fifteen years, it is clear that substantial progress has been made in the process of restructuring the Spanish state and establishing regional political authorities which share power with the central government in Madrid (…). The regional institutions are functioning well and seem to have attained a reasonable degree of public acceptance and approval. Moreover, there are statistics to show that, stimulated by their new found freedom of action, a number of regions (some traditionally wealthy and others traditionally poor) have launched self-propelled initiatives for development, often grasping the new opportunities provided by EU funding (…). On the debit side, however, as regional governments have striven to consolidate their position, there is some evidence that, at least viewed from the perspective of the local authorities, regional centralism, especially in the larger communities (i.e.: the regions; TB&LS), has tended to replace Madrid centralism. The central government, however, is not unaware of this and has recently announced that a future priority will be the strengthening of local autonomy" (Newton & Donaghy, 1997). May be the *Pacto Local*, approved in 1999 by the Cortes, will enhance local autonomy. The Pact is meant to, at least, strengthening the role of the mayors and the control powers of the municipal council (the *pleno*), thus increasing the stability of local authorities. Until now, the results of the Pacto Local are rather unsatisfactory. This is probably due to the fact that the position of local government not only depends on the roles of mayors and councils. It could be argued, that decentralisation by the regional government is a necessary condition for an increase in local autonomy as well.

Each Spanish autonomous community has its own capital and is governed by a

Legislative Assembly with its own statute of autonomy. The assembly, elected by universal voting, chooses a regional president from among its members. Executive and administrative powers are exercised by the Council of Government, which is headed by the president and responsible to the assembly.

The autonomous communities have financial autonomy; they get finance from the central government as well as from local taxes and special levies. A regional Court of Audit (*Tribunal de Cuentas)* is in charge of monitoring the financial administration of the autonomous community.

Provinces 2.3

Spain consists of 50 provinces according to an administrative division carried out in 1833. The provinces were created after the example of the French *départements*, as both local units and outposts of central government (Newton and Donaghy, 1997: 154). To this day, the provincial division serves this dual purpose.

Provincial government is administered by a provincial council, which consists of deputies elected every four years. The election system is indirect and based on the results of the municipal elections. Deputies have to be municipal councillors. The political parties appoint the deputies. The number of deputies depends on the population size:

- Less than 500.000 inhabitants: 25 deputies
- Between 500.001 and 1.000.000 inhabitants: 27 deputies
- Between 1.000.001 and 3.500.000 inhabitants: 31 deputies
- Over 3.500.001 inhabitants: 51 deputies

The members of the full council elect a president at the first meeting; the president is a member of the council. The Provincial Council may introduce regulations based on legislation from the Cortes or the regional parliament. The major tasks of the provinces are to co-ordinate and support municipal service deliveries, and give economic, legal and technical assistance to the municipalities.

At present, many people still consider the provincial division an artificial one and in some regions there have been attempts to abolish provinces. In some autonomous communities, Catalonia and Castilla y León, *comarcas* have been formed. Comarcas are forms of compulsory co-operation between municipalities and they

can be seen as contenders of the provinces. Some other autonomous communities are preparing the creation of comarcas (*comarcalización)* as well. Yet up till now the provincial administration has kept its function. The main provincial sources of income are similar to those of the municipalities, i.e. internal taxation on private goods and services; a tax on business; state grants (general and specific) and loans (OECD, 1997).

Municipalities   2.4

Municipalities have traditionally been seriously under-funded. In recent years, however, there has been a move towards obtaining more resources and acquiring more effective autonomy. Some people hold the view that, in the decentralisation process that came with the advent of democracy, municipalities were left out, in favour of the newly created self-governing communities. A comparison of the functions performed by municipalities 20 to 30 years ago and those they perform today shows little difference. Recently, the larger municipalities have joined forces in a campaign to reform this situation and continue the process of decentralisation by extending effective self-government to the lowest level.

There are about 8,000 municipalities in Spain, ranging in size from a few inhabitants to over three million. The vast majority is very small: 92 per cent of the municipalities have fewer than 10,000 inhabitants and 60 per cent less than 1,000 (OECD, 1997). In some of the municipalities small local administrations (*Administraciones locales menores*) have been created, entities such as parishes which are part of a municipality but have some decentralised competences.

In 1978 the Spanish Constitution established the principle of local autonomy (*autonomía local*) as the basis of the entire local government system, and in 1985 the basic law on local government (*Ley reguladora de las Bases del Régimen Local*) was refined. There has been some discussion about whether the concept of local autonomy meant 'self-government' or a somewhat more limited level of powers and functions. The common view seems to be that it means self-government. Local governments have the right to freely establish their own priorities and choose the policies they consider most suitable for reaching certain goals within the legal framework.

The responsibilities of the municipalities were only loosely defined in the Local

Government Act of 1985, and are further specified by legislation from both the central and regional governments. Which activities a municipality really undertakes, depends on its financial and human resources, as well as political priorities. Local governments are, however, bound by law to provide certain basic services, depending on the size of the local population (see table 1).

Municipal tasks	All	Over 5.000 inhabitants	Over 20.000 inhabitants	Over 50.000 inhabitants
Lighting	X	X	X	X
Cemetery	X	X	X	X
Refuse collection	X	X	X	X
Street cleaning	X	X	X	X
Water supply	X	X	X	X
Sewerage	X	X	X	X
Access to population nucleus	X	X	X	X
Pavement	X	X	X	X
Food and drink control	X	X	X	X
Public park		X	X	X
Public library		X	X	X
Market		X	X	X
Refuse recycling		X	X	X
Civil protection			X	X
Social services			X	X
Fire fighting			X	X
Sport facilities			X	X
Public transport				X
Environmental protection				X

Table 1. Local government tasks

Those municipalities that are unable to provide the basic services required by law can ask the regional government for dispensation. The regional government can charge the provincial council with the task in question. All of the municipalities are allowed to provide services like education and health, but only the larger ones have done so.

The main sources of income of municipalities are taxation on businesses and

property, charges for the costs of individual services, state grants and loans. Local governments may not impose a surcharge on State taxes. Although the local governments' share in total public expenditures is much lower than, for instance, regional authorities, they have more control over their income, since between 50 per cent and 60 per cent of it comes from local sources. This means that, although municipalities have a far lower level of income than regions, they enjoy relatively more financial autonomy.

By law, every year local authorities are obliged to approve and publish a single budget covering all revenues and expected expenditures during the coming financial year. For a certain period budgetary plans can be consulted by members of the public, who have the right to lodge a complaint. Final approval of the budget has to be given by the council (OECD, 1997).

The council   2.5

Local government policy-making is quite free and autonomous. It is therefore important to look at the political and governing structures of local government (Joan Botella, 1995). The municipal council (pleno) is the rulemaking elected body of municipal government. It has the right to design and approve regulations, which must conform to legislation emanating from either the Cortes or the regional parliament (Newton & Donaghy, 1997).

Citizens directly elect the council, every four years, by universal voting. There is no limit to the number of terms of office the councillors may serve. The councillors elect the mayor, from those who headed the various party lists. If there is no majority favouring one party leader, the post of mayor is assigned to the councillor who headed the most voted-for list. The number of councillors to be elected depends on the population size of the municipality, in a non-proportional way (see table 2). There has to be an odd number of councillors.

Number of inhabitants	Number of councillors
< 250	5
251 - 1,000	7
1,001 - 2,000	9
2,001 - 5,000	11
5,001 - 10,000	15
10,001 - 20,000	17
20,001 - 50,000	21
50,001 - 100,000	25
> 100,000, for each 100,000	1 extra

Table 2. Number of municipal councillors

The mayor   2.6

The Spanish mayor plays an active political role and also has a representational function (during visits by the King and Queen, foreign statesmen or members of (inter-)national trade or cultural delegations). The mayor is the chief representative and president of the municipality, chairperson of the full council, head of the executive board and head of the municipal administration. The main function is to manage the municipal government. As the head of the municipal police force, the mayor is responsible in case of local emergencies or catastrophes. Furthermore, he has the right to appoint members of other municipal organisations. Clearly many employees, although appointed in his name, are in practice appointed by the heads of the departments concerned. The mayor is more or less the daily contact with the citizens: he is often asked to act as chair for many local organisations, or to perform ceremonial functions, ranging from opening large fairs to attending talent contests.

The executive board (comisión municipal de gobierno)   2.7

Only municipalities with over 5,000 inhabitants have an executive board. The executive board consists of the mayor, the deputy mayor and a number of councillors, the latter who normally are members of the majority party. In this chapter they will be called aldermen. The aldermen are appointed and can be dismissed

by the mayor. The principal task of the board is to assist the mayor in his duties. In practice, especially in the large municipalities, each member is given responsibility for a particular sector of administration or a particular district of the municipality (Newton & Donaghy, 1997: 150).

Committees   2.8

In every municipality there are committees. The number of committees depends on the size of the municipality. Sometimes a committee serves more than one municipality; these committees are called district committees (*Juntas municipales de distrito*). The responsibility of the committee lies with a councillor or delegate, who sometimes but not always is a member of the committee. The committees usually consist of citizens, who are appointed with the approval of the municipal council. The main task of the committee is to represent the interests of local residents and channel their complaints and problems to the municipal council.

The larger municipalities also have sectoral advisory committees (*consejos sectoriales*). The main function of the advisory committees is to enable councillors of all political persuasions to participate in an advisory capacity in specific policy fields in which they have a special interest or expertise. The councillors also serve as channels of communication between the board and the political minority groups.

Administration   2.9

All municipalities have special departments for policy fields, usually headed by an alderman (Newton and Donaghy, 1997: 151). Only the smallest municipalities have an administration which has not been divided into units that specialise in particular realms of interest.

Not all personnel have a mere municipal responsibility. The secretario and the interventor are civil servants appointed to make sure the municipality abides administrative and budgetary laws; they are responsible of the a priori adjustment of municipal decisions to the law. The function of secretario is a special one and specific exams are organised by the central administration. The secretarios are sent to the municipality by the central government to advise legal matters. The secretario does not have the power to block a measure taken by the local authority. The

courts play an important role in decisions on matters of legality and responsibilities (in particular, whether municipalities exceed their capacities). Every authority has access to the Courts. The inventor controls the budget and is recruited by the central administration. In small municipalities the functions of secretario and inventor are combined.

Every tier of government has its own special exams for civil servants. Circulation between the different tiers is almost impossible. Promotion is very difficult, being limited to three or four steps up; the possibility of careers growth is therefore restricted.

Metropolitan areas   2.10

Metropolitan areas can be established in large urban areas where the co-operation of adjacent municipalities is essential to provide a fair, rational and well-co-ordinated service in an area whose constituents have many economic and social problems in common. Regional law determines the organs of government and administration to be established and ensures the equal representation of all municipalities involved.

Between the smaller municipalities there exists co-operation as well; some have established voluntary co-operations (*mancomunidades de municipios or áreas metropolitanas*), in order to improve and co-ordinate the delivery of service that affect them all (generally traffic).

Local democracy   2.11

Prior to the arrival of democracy in Spain, Spanish citizens had little experience with being politically involved. After forty years without parliamentary elections, political parties were revived and they proliferated in the months following Franco's death.

According to Newton and Donaghy (1997: 162-163) local government has changed after Franco's death. An important improvement relates to the tightening up on accounting practices and on legislation aimed to ensure that devolution of responsibilities is accompanied by a devolution of resources. Important, too, is

the modernisation of communication and public involvement. One form of public involvement is the referendum, which mayors and presidents of provincial councils may voluntarily call for in matters of 'a local nature which are of special interest to local residents' - with the exception of financial matters. Besides this instrument, all Spanish citizens have access to an Ombudsman; some autonomous communities have their own ombudsman. Individual citizens also have the right to go to court and contest a decision, particularly in cases of amendments or sanctions. On the other hand, there is still no formal procedure for the consultation citizens. Town planning and budgetary plans are being exposed publicly.

As Newton and Donaghy state (1997: 163), not everything in local government bears a positive character. In general, however, there is little doubt that all kinds of reforms, plus the fact that local elections are now carried out in a fully democratic system, have reawakened a genuine interest in local affairs in recent years.

Local government - citizens relations

3

In this section we present the results of our research in the two selected cities.

Introduction   3.1

The end of the Franco era meant the start of the enhancement of citizen participation in both Alcobendas and Córdoba. In 1979, left-wing parties won the first democratic elections. From that moment on, according to the respondents, the municipalities felt the urge to improve living conditions through better planning, better infrastructure, better housing, more local jobs, and an increase in social cohesion. According to our respondents, it was the belief of local political leaders, that citizen participation was a necessary condition for reaching those policy goals.

The belief in the importance of citizen participation in the public sector has not dwindled, at least not in the cities we studied. The alderman we interviewed in Alcobendas emphasises the necessity of participation. The results of the local elections apparently showed him the following: "We know we have won the elections in spite of the fact that Alcobendas is a rich city. The budget per person is the

third highest of Spain's big cities. The municipality provides a wide range of services. The population is conservative from a sociological point of view. We created awareness of the community and political proximity. All aldermen are ready to attend the neighbourhoods at least twice a week in the afternoons. We are proud of the way we work. We listen to them."

The respondents from Córdoba, too, view citizen participation as an important aspect of the democratisation of society. The ideological motive seems to be even stronger than in Alcobendas, although the vice-mayor in Córdoba recognises the possible electoral effects as well. She also observes a change in the view of the conservative parties, which used to consider the citizen a consumer. They at least did so till the last elections, which they lost. One of the civil servants we interviewed adds a third argument for the necessity of citizen participation: "If people do not want to participate, it will be impossible to solve their problems. If we do not get citizens to change their behaviour and realise they have to help us, the problems of the citizens, especially the big problems, will find no solution." In her opinion, the municipal council does not have the necessary knowledge, since they are part of the formal structure. A progressive government should aim at a participatory democracy. Progress is slow, however. The government's attitude towards citizen participation has changed slightly since United Left regained governmental power in 1999 after a period of reign by the Partido Popular (the conservative party). "We could not advance, though we did not move back either. When there is a consolidated structure, it is very difficult for a politician to dismantle this, especially where citizens are involved", as one of the Córdoba civil servants we interviewed said.

The central position of associations 3.2

In both cities, citizen participation cannot be understood without addressing attention to the role and importance of associations, although the civil servants in Córdoba point out that, besides the formal participation structures, there exists an informal participation network which is more dynamic than the formal one. Citizen participation doesn't always have to be organised, it can bear a spontaneous character as well.
The fact remains that in Spain citizen participation mainly consists of participation of associations. In Córdoba, for instance, the total number of associations is over 2000, 970 of which are registered. Each association represents between 10-

400 inhabitants; 40 to 50 per cent of the population are members of an association. About 10 per cent of the members are active. The character of the different associations varies widely, ranging from associations of "friends of wine" to regional associations. Córdoba has several kinds of associations: citizens associations, sector associations (of women, young people and the elderly, for instance), and issue associations (asociaciones temáticas), the latter promote leisure and culture.

What people participate in an association depends on the type of association concerned. According to our respondents, in Córdoba there is no difference in participation levels between richer and poorer neighbourhoods. Participants are mainly middle-aged people, who are more strongly involved in the activities of the neighbourhood. Topics of discussion are, form example, "the defective lampposts or inconvenience caused by dog faeces". People who participate are the citizens who seek solutions for the problems they face at that particular moment.

Difficulties   3.3

As stated before, the emphasis heavily lies on participation by associations. All respondents acknowledge some difficulties.

The first problem is the temporal and voluntary character of associations. One of the Alcobendas civil servants, for instance, explained: "If the participation model is based on the associative movement, that is, if people participate only when they are members of an association, the characteristics of the association will determine in the 90 per cent of the cases the success of the project. Citizens are not aware of their importance as spokespersons of the civil society. This is often overlooked and leads to organs of participation not working properly." Many associations are rather weak. The Alcobendas alderman stated: "The associations are in a permanent crisis, wrestling with low participation rates, the need for rejuvenation of their membership, a lack of knowledge of new management techniques, etc. We formulate long-time objectives and try to involve the people who are not associated."

A second problem, and probably the main problem of participation by means associations, is the associations' specialisation: they act solely as interest groups. As the

vice-mayor of Córdoba states: "We should recognise that individualism and particular interests affect the associations. Yesterday they were interested in the general urban policy; today they focus on street-lights. They have all fought for the foundation of a library in each civic centre, for their own green areas and their squares. The list is endless. They have fought to get things for their neighbourhoods and not for the city. We have tried to lift these demands to a higher level by devising, for example, a programme of popular festivities, in order to make fair use of the municipal funds."

A third problem is doubts about the role associations have to or are willing to play in society. The civil servants in Alcobendas observe that the associations do not know what role to play: that of collaborator or critic. The associations usually decide to collaborate with the local authority, adopting a non-critical attitude. The local authority, on the other hand, supports a strong and important associative movement and wants more independent associations.

Special attention for participation   3.4

In both cities, local authorities have formulated participation policies and created a specialised department for participation. Both municipalities invest in research as well.

The municipality of Alcobendas pays special attention to monitoring citizen's satisfaction about service delivery. In the last few years, citizens seem to have become a bit more satisfied. For all municipal services the municipality has complaint sheets, and policemen are obliged to carry these complaint sheets with them. The municipality is said to respond to suggestions or demands in ten days.

The municipality aims to make the associations less dependent on the municipality, and more critical. We understand that such a critical role is necessary to gain knowledge of the popular preferences and demands. Civil servants, the political majority, and also the opposition seem to support this goal and advocate a policy of stimulating the association movement. The main reason for this is to increase legitimacy. Nonetheless the civil servants observe some differences between themselves and politicians, the latter who appear to be slightly more reluctant to devoluting power. The local authority of Córdoba has a comprehensive participation programme. In collaboration with the Andalusian Institute of Advanced Social Studies, it con-

tinuously studies citizen participation. It has created a House of Citizenship (casa de la ciudadanía) in order to decrease atomisation through bringing together representatives of the councils and the federations. In the House of Citizenship, there will come a centre of studies on citizen participation. The third element of the participation programme is the process of budgetary participation that the local authority started in 1999. In the first year, a period of education about the characteristics of a budget began. Currently, it is being studied what part of the budget can be opened to participation (probably investments). Finally, a programme has been implemented supported by the Complutense University of Madrid and related to the experiences in other countries, to initiate an irreversible process of increased participation in budgetary matters, not by established organs but by the people.

The municipality of Córdoba takes a specific approach to enhancing citizen participation. The vice-mayor is clearly in favour of eliminating the dependence between citizens and political parties, and of tackling the way associations function. The associations function too much like political parties. In her opinion, they impose a presidential method, favouring the interests of the president of the association, to the detriment of the interests of the associated citizens. "It is necessary to develop a working method in the different areas that is based on the delegation of power to the citizens, and opens the channels of participation in all the municipal departments so that the department of citizen participation can be abolished. Citizen participation should be a managing device. My dream, in a word, is that my responsibility becomes redundant." She is convinced that citizens are willing to participate in the way she wants them to, "because they have fought against the dictatorship from the citizen movements. We try to attract new organisations (non-governmental organisations, assisting associations) to the ideas of involved citizenship. The current ideologies do not favour this."

Facilitating participation   3.5

An important aspect of the municipal policy on participation is assisting the associations, in order to strengthen them. Although this is the policy in both cities, it is emphasised more strongly in Alcobendas. One way of doing this, is offering training to the associations and their members. Training consists of internal management training, but also of giving information on what role the associations could play in society (or should play, according to the local authority).

There is another way of facilitating the associations. The municipality of Alcobendas has opened 'civic centres'. Civic centres (*centros cívicos*) are facilities in each of the seven neighbourhoods of the city. The civic centre is a place where the neighbourhood council is located and organises its activities. The associations go to the civic centre to develop their own activities and projects. They get technical support there and the citizens can ask for information about the municipality and its services. One of these civic centres is special: it is the House of the Associations. Here the associations have offices to work from. Moreover, in the House of the Associations, training services are offered to the associations: "If we enable the members of the associations to express their demands and their points of view, perhaps the boards will be able to renew themselves. If we enable them to devise better projects and memoirs, we will get the associations to express their demands." The city council pays for the civic centres, the training and for a juridical consultant.

In Córdoba there are civic centres as well. The municipality is said to strongly support citizens who want to participate. As the vice-mayor explains: "In only one year we aim to double the number of territorial facilities and the number of people working for these facilities. We are going to increase the budget of programmes which foster participation and support the associative movement in the different territories."

Councils: diminishing self-interest 3.6

One of the main problems of the associations is that they act as interest groups. In order to increase their sense of responsibility for the entire city, both cities have established councils where representatives of a great number of associations meet.

In Alcobendas there are neighbourhood councils (*consejos de barrio*) and sector councils (*consejos sectoriales*). The city is divided into seven neighbourhoods and seven neighbourhood councils. The Alcobendas neighbourhood councils are presided over by the aldermen of the respective neighbourhoods (except in the youth council); their members are appointed by the associations. The councils meet every month. The municipality intends to change the councils. The establishment of neighbourhood councils was meant to decrease sectoralisation; however, results were disappointing. Instead of councils that only express their opinion

when they have problems, the municipality would like the councils to become permanent discussion partners in the process of solving general problems in the neighbourhoods.

In Córdoba, representatives of all the associations in a certain district are brought together in the district councils (*consejos de distrito*). The presidents of the district councils and the president of the federation of citizens associations (*federación de asociaciones de vecinos*) constitute the council of the citizen movement. These organs, the council of the citizen movement and the district councils, are recognised as parallel organs for citizen participation, by an agreement of the city council. The councils receive municipal funds to fulfil their tasks. Formal structures are, however, not the only instruments to decrease the self-interest of associations and councils. Pragmatism is one as well, according to the vice-mayor: "If necessary, if every districts only recognises its own priorities, we'll be ready to take the representatives of the districts on a bus trip through the city. We will show the wants and needs of the other districts and force them to take responsibility for all districts."

Other solutions: city forum and co-management 3.7

The municipality of Alcobendas has experimented with an extensive participation project, the so-called 'city forum' (*foro ciudad*). According to Alcobendas' civil servants, the municipality made a strategic plan about six years ago. This was a plan about what the near future of the city would have to look like. Universities, associations, trade unions, businessmen and individual citizens were invited to participate in the debate on the future. The local authority wanted it to be a forum of participation. Reality was different, however. Participation did not persist.

Because of this disappointing result, the local authority has changed its ambitions. It now wants to integrate the associations in large long-term strategic projects. Quite interesting from the point of view of our research is that the city tries to stimulate the non-associated citizen to get involved and participate. Discussions on 'the minor issues' (the colour of a public bench, street-lights) should attract them to become involved in the management or co-management of the city. The co-ordination of the various and conflicting interest and demands still remains a problem.

This might be a fundamental change in the type of democracy in Alcobendas, a shift from a mere representative democracy into a direct one, a loss of power of

the municipal council to the association movement and the neighbourhood councils. It is hard to say; in the end the local authority still decides. Despite the room for participation, the final decision is a political one.

An interesting experiment in Córdoba is that of co-management. An example may be useful to illustrate what is meant by this. The vice-mayor explains co-management as follows: "For instance, the Holy Week is very important in Córdoba and every brotherhood organises its own procession. When the Communist Party governed for the first time, the Union of the Brotherhoods (*agrupación de cofradías*) was founded. The government gradually delegated the organisation of the Holy Week to this Union, with the support of the department of public festivities and the local police. We signed a collaboration agreement and started subsidising the Union for the celebration of an event we consider a traditional and cultural one. This is an example of transferring the management of a cultural event to the community's infrastructure."

The local authority has introduced citizen participation in the decision-making process in a number of municipal enterprises and decentralised organs, for example, in the Foundation of Painting called 'Gran Teatro', the board of the Botanical Garden, a board of sports, etc. The municipality promotes participation in these organs by means of the compulsory presence of representatives of the citizen movement. The representatives are members of the board of these enterprises and organs. They concern themselves in the subjects of leisure and culture. The municipality apparently wants citizens to participate in the policy of maintenance of the city, and aims to achieve this through budgetary participation.

Remaining problems   3.8

Despite these efforts, both municipalities are confronted with many problems in citizen participation. Some problems are internal, other external.

A problem only Alcobendas faces, is the integration and participation of immigrants from Morocco, the Dominican Republic, Peru, and other countries. These immigrants live in different neighbourhoods of the city and there are regularly conflicts with their Spanish neighbours. The Spanish inhabitants make sure such problems come to the fore in the neighbourhood councils. The municipality is concerned about this development, fearing that the situation could become explo-

sive. The municipality is looking for channels to deal with this problem and therefor supports associations of immigrants. By doing so, new discussion partners come forward, not only for the municipality, but for the traditional Spanish associations as well.

Another problem in Alcobendas is that not all civil servants subscribe to the emphasis put on participation, despite the enthusiasm of the alderman and the civil servants of the participation department. Reluctance seems to be rife. Our respondents informed us that colleagues from other departments of the local administration perceive citizen participation as something that could create more problems for them. They fear that participation will cost more time "because it is necessary to adapt oneself to the rhythm of the people". They themselves would like developments to speed up. They are in favour of co-management. This means that citizens will get more responsibility for the management of houses and public enterprises. Co-management would require more training of the associations. A first step has been taken in the form of a project of co-management with several youth and cultural associations. According to the civil servants, "the truth is that the associations should have more knowledge."

The co-management strategy experiences difficulties, however, as experiences in Córdoba clearly show. One problem with co-management is that of finding suitable non-profit associations (the United Left government of Córdoba would never delegate municipal management to profit-making individuals or collectives). Another persisting difficulty is the lacking sense of responsibility of associations and councils. To the disappointment of the vice-mayor, district councils are not ready to take full responsibility for their affairs. "We received some demands about the functioning of a civic centre. Then we asked the district council to take charge ... and they rejected the proposal. The movement is still not prepared to take responsibility. They want to have a father to take charge." One reason for this is probably a lack of information, according to the vice-mayor. "We try to guarantee a high level of information about the decisions made or to be made. This enables citizens to participate. Besides, the process of participation requires a dialogue and bargaining in policy-making. Informing citizens is a problem, however, because the information provided by of the media creates a malfunctioning of the process of dialogue."

Paradoxically, associations and councils refuse to take full responsibility, but at other times they behave as if they were the municipal council. Vice-mayor

Moruno states: "I'd like to emphasise that a tension is produced by the fact the citizen movement cannot resist the temptation of taking the place of the local government. For that to be possible, it would be necessary that the current system of elections disappears. At the very least they try to get their decisions to be accepted without discussion. Anyway, the citizen movement is in good health, although it is affected by individualism like the rest of the society."

Also, there is, as always, the budgetary aspect. As the Córdoba civil servants observe: "If reduction of public expenditure is necessary, the Department of Participation will be the first victim, because it is expensive to preserve a structure and the teams in the street. It is very hard to get the alderman to keep up the level of expenditure."

Conclusion 4

What lessons can be learnt from these two Spanish cases; what conclusions can be drawn? We have to be very careful here, since we only interviewed politicians and civil servants who are involved in participation policies. In addition, the two cities studied certainly do not represent all municipalities in Spain: they are governed by left-wing parties, whereas most Spanish cities have conservative governments. Our conclusions therefore only hold for Alcobendas and Córdoba.

The emphasis on participation by associations can, nevertheless, probably be observed in other Spanish municipalities as well. In both Alcobendas and Córdoba we learned that all political parties were in favour of increasing this form of citizen participation. Both municipalities try to reach the non-participating citizens, either by informal contacts or by stimulating them to participate in associations. The most effective way seems to lie in active membership of associations (although citizens do have the individual right to make suggestions to the municipality).

The municipalities are faced with some problems: the vulnerability of associations and councils, their ad hoc character, their doubtful strength and quality, their lack of enthusiasm in accepting more responsibilities, in becoming critical counterparts of the local authority in strategic policy-making, and in becoming co-managers of services. Municipalities seriously search for solutions, such as reorganising the councils and creating facilities and special departments.

Empowerment, in the sense of supporting of associations, is another aspect that attracted our attention. The municipality of Alcobendas has an intensive programme of assisting the associations through providing civic centres, meeting facilities, training and advice. Córdoba seems to follow the same policy, in a less articulated form. Both cities have created several types of councils, which serve as channels of influence to the associations.

What strikes us most is the ideological emphasis put on participation. Citizen participation is perceived as an important value, as a natural feature of democracy. Participation is a democratic right as well as a necessity. The credo seems to be 'no democracy without participation', participation meaning more than representation in the municipal council (the *pleno*). In both cities the participatory strategy can be observed. The representative democracy, the municipal council, is hardly ever mentioned. Again we can conclude this only for the two cities studied. Representation appears to be an inadequate means to learn about the needs and wishes of the people. Participation is said to be necessary for both legitimacy and effectiveness. Whether this emphasis on participatory democracy is connected to the relative youth of the Spanish democracy is uncertain. This is no more than a hypothesis. Without hesitation, however, we can say that it is likely. Almost all the interviewees started with referring to the end of the Franco era, the beginning of democracy. And, let us not forget that Spanish democracy has existed for less than 25 years.

1 The authors owe José Ruano de la Fuente for his enthusiastic support before, during and after the interviews.

2 Not to forget the two autonomous cities (ciudades autónomas) Ceuta and Melilla in Northafrica: local governments with a higher level of autonomy.