

New Participative Trends in Spanish Cities: Reality and Fashion

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ABSTRACT

Spanish Cities have implemented new participative tools during the last years, or strengthened the existing ones. The starting point of this process has been the important Law 57/2003, which has introduced new compulsory mechanisms in the main cities (social councils, neighbourhoods administrations, complaints and suggestions commissions), as well as general duties in this arena for all municipalities (duty of passing new regulation establishing mechanisms and procedures favouring citizens' participation, use of ICT to stimulate participation).

As a result of that, the citizens' participation has become a crucial part of the local policies and of the political marketing at the local level in Spain, independently of the political trend of every Local Government. Even in some important cities, the Citizens' Participation Department is directly depending of the Mayor's Cabinet and is a key part of the Mayor's policy.

Even the pluralist Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) has designed a strategy in order to strength the citizens' participation, implemented by more than 250 municipalities, and included the more important cities of the country. There is also an important effect of some mechanisms born in the context of the Portoalegre Forum, such as the participative budgeting at the neighbourhood level.

Citizens' participation has reached an important place in the local political discourse and in most of cases is a reality, but also there are cases of mere fashion and cleavages between words and reality.

This paper will expose the main aspects and real results of this Policy in the Spanish cities.

Key Words: citizens' participation, local democracy, governance