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# Outcomes of Democratic Innovations: Horizontalism as Inclusive Participation Spillover, but Fragile under Hierarchical Attacks

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**Abstract**: Anti-austerity protests revived anti- and post-hegemonic sociopolitical imaginary, around the word. In Spain, 15M movement built the premises for political projects based on direct democracy and horizontal models of social organization, as defining features of the new muncipalists who won 2015 elections in several cities. The case of Madrid has revelatory value in the debate regarding outcomes of participatory innovations, as the alliance which pioneered digital democracy and multi-actor multi-level local governance lost elections of 2019. Although a relatively large body of research investigated the feasibility of democratic innovations by contrasting their designs and implementation processes onto the matrix of their objectives and underlying ideological principles, the literature explaining their outcomes is scarce. Few studies focus on factors modeling the sustainability of participatory democracy as city regime, and the most common approach stresses out neoliberal inhibitors, as structural breaks which limit the depth and quality of participation. The present study aims to contribute to filling this gap by extending the analytical framework to encompass factors related to horizontalism, as enablers of democracy innovations. It is concluded that while horizontal governance works as a spillover of inclusive participation, it is highly vulnerable to attacks designed to vertically restructure its working processes.

**Keywords:** *Democratic innovations, participatory democracy, municipalism, horizontalism.*

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## Introduction

In 2015, Ahora Madrid (Madrid Now), a left oriented political platform, built on different social movement organizations, won local elections in the Spanish capital and interrupted, as such, the 24 year tradition of center-right municipal government of Madrid. Its program merged different grievances articulated across 15M movement, during the anti-austerity nationwide protests of 2011 (Janoschka & Mota, 2021; Mayne & Nicolini, 2020). As a highly diverse web of contesters, 15M or Los Indignados rallied against neoliberal policies and translated the perceived high levels of political corruption, as well as the downfall in the quality of life, as symptoms of a deprecated democracy model, based on the joint interests of political and economic elites. The result of public-private partnerships supposedly left citizens' needs unaddressed and caused high social and economic vulnerability for most of the social groups comprising the civil society (Janoschka & Mota, 2021; Martínez, & Wissink, 2021). Slogans as "Real Democracy, Now!" or "They Don't Represent Us!" signaled an outcry for converting the public-private dominion into public-civil arrangements, by building direct democracy and participatory mechanisms into city management systems (Romanos & Sádaba, 2016).

Significantly, even though corruption was the trigger that enabled the wide waves of street action, the underlying general claim resembled the social disappointment with representative democracy (Kioupkiolis, 2021, 2018). There were no calls for more powerful institutions of force, to come strong and clean the perceived vicious political ecosystem, as it happened, for instance, in Romania, during the anti-corruption protests of 2017-2019 (Dumitrica, 2022). The different labeling of corruption and its causes reflects a divergent cultural understanding over political processes and their enablers. It may be argued that a conservative worldview would easily accommodate corruption as the result of "bad persons doing bad things". The discontent is, therefore, directed against the perceived villains and pacification is conditioned by their severe punishment. Focus over punishment requires powerful prosecutors and ready made public heroes readily assigned to play the role of saviors coming to restore order over chaos. This narrative may be parsed into two distinct components. The first building block of meaning concerns the implicit description of the social order, depicted in vertical terms: society as a whole is ruled – not managed or served – by small groups of elites. The second is related to the behavior of the rulers. The

conservative view identifies the root of corruption in their faulty behaviors and asks for an equally strong actor to overturn their degrading hegemony.

In sharp contrast, the 15M shared narrative, built on democratic values, employs the same gist blocks, but places the root of the problem on the first deck of meaning. For Los Indignados, corruption was a byproduct of a society vertically ruled by elites. In their view, the faulty behavior of rulers is derived from the social order that enables a few to decide for the lives of the many. The solution, therefore, cannot stand into replacing the powerful and vicious few with other powerful few, under the hope that the new protagonists will prove purer and worthier. A horizontal framing shaped the contestatory imaginary of Spanish protesters, resulting in the rise of the so called fearless cities (Russell, 2019). Local elections of 2015 marked the revival of muncipalism in Madrid and Barcelona, as well as in Valencia, Zaragoza, A Coruña, Cádiz, Santiago or Campostela, among others (Janoschka & Mota, 2021; Mayne & Nicolini, 2020). It also enacted a bold departure from the neoliberal paradigm of the smart city, by endorsing technopolitics instead (Smith & Martín, 2022).

The vertical and horizontal framings of the ideal social order enable very different paths of action in response to the same perceived phenomena. While the hierarchical view embraces a power-to-power response, the horizontal perspective prescribes power circumvention through networks designed to facilitate distributed collaborative direct action and decision making. The former reloads traditional politics, placing citizens on passive mode, as the receivers of policies and events happen to them through the will and wisdom of the few. The last enables generative politics, defined as a structural assembly of mechanisms and systems designed to assist and facilitate citizens' coordinated direct production of policies and events, so they may shape their own reality (Giddens, 1994).

Participatory innovations, as products of horizontalism, were boldly prioritized during the 2015-2019 mandate of Ahora Madrid. The awarded digital platform of "Decide Madrid" was built in order to facilitate citizen legislative initiatives and projects (Royo, Pina, & Garcia-Rayado, 2020). A citizen centric participatory budgeting mechanism was carefully designed. Local forums were established and The City Observatory, an institution that mirrors the City Council, but it's run by regular citizens instead of politicians, was opened. However, in 2015, Ahora Madrid committed not only to cover institutional design, to ensure citizens' participation in city management, but also to champion solutions to the housing crisis and climate change related issues (Janoschka & Mota, 2021; Mayne & Nicolini, 2020).

Few studies to date investigate the efficacy of the participatory experiment of Madrid, as a city regime, and its lasting blueprint after municipal elections of 2019 (Janoschka & Mota, 2021; Martínez & Wissink, 2021). Although the alliance won more votes than any other party running for the office, the mayor seat was secured again by the right leaning parties after they joined forces with Vox, a far-right political assembly (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020). The common approach in analyzing the efficacy of Ahora Madrid mandate consists in revealing inner and outer neoliberal constrains faced by the coalition in implementing its agenda on housing and clean transportation (Janoschka & Mota, 2021; Martínez & Wissink, 2021). Virtually no research covers the blockages that hindered the unfolding of participatory projects, apart from legal, economic and political neoliberal tradition which perpetuates high barriers to prevent citizens' interfering with the public service and private actors' interests.

The present study aims to expand the analytical framework by pointing out how horizontalist frameworks worked as democracy innovation spillovers, but the very same structures presented intrinsic vulnerability to hierarchical attacks, designed to vertically reshape them. The article builds on the critical review of the literature covering municipalism and multi-actor multi-level urban governance, in the context of Madrid participatory experiment. The first section resume the case of Ahora Madrid mandate, from its premises built within 15M movements, to its constituency as a confluence, as opposed to a party, following its electoral agenda and its outcomes in the aftermath of losing the 2019 elections. The second section covers the transition from public-private partnerships to public-civil collaboration, as urban regime instituted by Ahora Madrid. Constrains explaining the limited impact of this transition are highlighted. The third part concentrates upon horizontalism, as methodological approach of operational value in enabling the experience of direct democracy political philosophy. Concluding remarks suggest that apart from neoliberal constrains, interaction specificities within horizontal structures may explain the limited impact of Madrid case of participatory democracy.

## The case of Ahora Madrid

As established during mid-1970s, Spanish democracy was mainly enacted through the interplay of two major representative bodies, the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) on the left, and Popular Party (PP) on the right. By the 1990s, both assemblies dramatically lost popular trust, as they were already blamed of losing contact with citizens (Mayne & Nicolini,

2020). The financial crisis of 2007-2008 enabled a peak-rise of neoliberal austerity policies across Europe, socializing the debt that was crippling all banking systems. As a performative discourse and a set of ideological frameworks covering institutional and operational policies in urban development, neoliberalisation deeply shaped coping mechanisms enabled during the financial crisis and normalized austerity public management, not just as a shock response, but as the only acceptable option for progress. As it became the main worldwide driver of capitalism, neoliberal policies, epitomized by austerity measures, reframed the structures of life, pushing back the power limits of the states and expanded citizens' exposure to free market phenomena (Janoschka & Mota, 2021). Middle and low income citizens were strongly affected all over the world, with Spain reaching in 2011 a rate of 46.2 percent of unemployment for youth. A severe housing crisis dismantled households across the country, with some estimates of 517 families losing their homes on a daily basis in 2012. Against this turbulent social background, PSOE and PP firmly implemented a wide austerity agenda, by dramatically cutting funds for education, health and social security services (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020).

The 15M movement or Los Indignados rallied against these measures, as well as against the historical parties, perceived as highly corrupt. At the same time, Europe was flooded by popular discontent caused by democratic deputies' lack of responsiveness towards citizens' grievances, which turned street politics into party politics. The new municipalisms sprang on this socio-political trend, as an endeavor to secure local autonomy in terms of policies focused on social and economic fairness (Janoschka & Mota, 2021; Martínez & Wissink, 2021; Russell, 2019). The Spanish protests massively built upon concepts pioneered by the alter-globalization movement, enhancing its model of deliberative democracy with inclusive organizational methodologies. Turning public squares into empathic meeting spaces, they practiced radical dialogical inclusion. Contestatory mobs turned into a myriad of thematic debating clubs spontaneously organized on the streets. Their ruling principle was to allow everyone to talk and to listen to all voices with equal consideration. This further conducted to the emergence of a shared vision over ideal politics framed as politics of "anyone", in sharp contrast with the current environment, run by and focused on elites. Unlike other corruption or austerity triggered protests, 15M made the quality democracy, its central issue. Corruption was explained by weak democratic control that allows politicians and markets to get richer on the expense of regular citizens, whose living conditions get degraded (Romanos & Sádaba, 2016).

The dire situation triggered by the financial crisis, was explained as an illustration and a result of liberal representative democracy, based on strong ties between political and private affairs fields, a system presumed to cut off, by design, common citizens' interests (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020). Significantly, Spaniards experienced austerity measures after a long period of political support for real estate actors. Private investors and big economic players throve, as they engulfed in mega-infrastructure projects, building private and local airports, high-speed train routes and public transportation facilities, while acting on and consolidating a tradition dating from Franco's rule, based on bridging political, financial and corporate elites under a pro-growth ideology. At the local level, this approach resulted in privatizing and outsourcing most of the public services, from street cleaning to waste collection, from sports infrastructure to public transportation service and maintenance (Janoschka & Mota, 2021).

While translating the current social pain as a consequence of the liberal democracy design, focused on political and economic elites, 15M movement revived the lines of thought which powered European social movements of 1970s and 1980s, when the concept of direct democracy surfaced above and beyond the Anarchist tradition that originated it. In Spain, direct democracy was proposed as an alternative to liberal, socialist and Catholic inspired democracy (Romanos & Sádaba, 2016). Los Indignados used both the setup and the conceptual repertoire rooted in the tradition of direct action and self-organization, to shape their stand on the current state of political, social and economic issues. Protesters acknowledged the effects produced by the financial crisis on middle- and low-income citizens' lives as a direct result of a system based on public-private partnership that protected political and economic big players, envisioned as thriving on the exclusion of common citizens' needs. Corruption, therefore, was defined as a byproduct of neoliberal mechanisms of accumulation, a phenomenon intimately intertwined with rampant privatization of public services (Janoschka & Mota, 2021).

Such a train of thought, although relatable to the Eastern Europe experience of mass privatization during democracy transition (Magnin & Nenovsky, 2022; Marandici, 2021; Gabrisch, 2020; Ghodsee, 2019), surprised international audiences accustomed to shape their discontent with current social and economic issues by blaming the institutional state and its enablers. A growing body of research reflects the biased neoliberal framing of private actors as just and competent warriors, politically sanitized, who are fighting the corrupt, incompetent political state. The presumed moral dichotomy corresponds to a social truth, which is a widely spread narrative

that curves knowledge production, as well as decisions in all fields of life, and by thus, producing a highly attuned reality (Lee, 2000; Sarbin, 1998). Based on this storyline, an anti-corruption industry was generated, that served to push private interests, not mainly against political ones, but more often than not, against common social good and regular citizens' needs (Heywood, 2017; Warburton, 2013; Sampson, 2010).

Several studies, focused on limitations encountered in the field of investigative journalism, confirm the preeminence of the neoliberal bias. Pointing towards the abundance of state-focused investigative media pieces and the scarcity of journalistic materials covering private actors' impunity, scholars explain the unbalance by relating it to differentiated transparency regulations that shape access to information. Public affairs are far more easily scrutinized by regular citizens and journalists alike, as they are more transparent and far less protected through non-disclosure agreements than those ran by private actors (Gerli, Mazzoni, & Mincigrucci, 2018). A product of unequal access to information, corruption related media pieces built a public image that consistently portrayed the state as the main villain, while securing silence around private actors whose image remained unchallenged.

Spain's new municipalisms built outside the narrative chambers enforcing the image of the political state as the archenemy of the mass market, progress and quality of life. In their promise to tackle corruption and inequality in territory development, they championed changes aimed to empower citizens to gain control over public management systems and subsequently replacing private control over public goods, with citizen centric institutional supervision (Medina-García, de la Fuente, & Van den Broeck, 2021). Since 2011, 15M movement naturalized this approach in framing the problem and its solution, paving the way for Ahora Madrid to run for elections in 2015, by promising a more transparent and inclusive way to govern the city, through what was pictured as an endeavor to resurrect the original mission of political institutions, meant to serve the regular citizens and the common good (Janoschka & Mota, 2021). Under the goal of developing participatory infrastructure to fill a void in local decision making institutional processes, several formal parties joined forces with political movements, along with many citizen networks pleading for social and economic rights (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020).

The new structure preserved social movement specificities and avoided traditional party internal organization. This choice allowed it to retain the high diversity of themes and identities forged during 15M protests. It also served to put in action the concept of deliberative democracy, as promoted by the movement for global justice that defined it as a culture

based on diversity, transparency, subjectivity and constructive confrontation aimed to build common grounds (Romanos & Sádaba, 2016). The confluence, as they called it, to avoid being labeled as a party, stepped in the electoral race by already innovating on the field of participatory processes. For the first time in the history of Madrid, the mayoral candidate and proposed city councilors were chosen by citizens themselves. The governmental program of Ahora Madrid was also community co-developed. Members established several meeting points across the city, where they collected feedback from citizens and anyone could stop and engage in debating over the most significant changes they needed to take place (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020).

The innovative electoral conduct was a consequence of Ahora Madrid blended structure, which allowed direct conversion of social movement specific practices and demands into behaviors and commitments accommodated within its political strata. Deliberation frameworks and mechanisms designed to ensure citizen participation in public decision making processes were historically integrated by political actors only under the pressure of social movements, after long fights and negotiations (Romanos & Sádaba, 2016; Pugh, 2009). The alliance bridged social and political actors, basically reducing to zero all transfer related delays, although maintaining procedural frictions as inherent phenomena of diversity. As such, its electoral campaign included a replication of 15M sit-ins methodology, converting public spaces into public agoras to arose and channel residents' collective intelligence. Working groups were formed to process the acquired knowledge, charted along a myriad of topics such as housing, economic sustainability, jobs, ecology and public participation. The resulted draft was electronically published and opened to consultation, so that citizens could add suggestions and further improve its content. They also voted on the perceived most pressing issues they wanted to be addressed, deciding, as such, the governmental program Ahora Madrid entered the electoral race, with over 15.000 people taking part in the process. 15M experience heavily served as inspiration in planning this phase, which mirrored how protesters used Propongo (I propose) platform, to debate and make collaborative decisions (Smith & Martín, 2022; Mayne & Nicolini, 2020).

To further run the campaign with no support from banks and institutions devoid of public trust, the alliance used fundraising mechanisms and engaged the local community in developing communication materials. Sharply departing from the political conventional communication, Ahora Madrid rejected the prospect of using specialized agency services and

encouraged citizens to freely create, download, modify and distribute a wide range of digital visual creations to support the cause, in what was labeled as a transition from "do it yourself" to "do it with others" or "do it together". The approach resulted in turning Manuela Carmena, the mayoral candidate, into a pop-star, with people changing their avatar photos with her picture and using hashtags like "we are Manuela" (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020).

After 2015 elections, PP ended up with the highest number of votes, Ahora Madrid being situated on the second place. The alliance secured 20 places in the City Council, one less seat than PP. Ciudadanos and PP together, the right leaning parties, lacked majority and PSOE, which won nine seats, supported Ahora Madrid and brought its candidate the mayoral office (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020). Translating the success of the participatory methodology experimented during the electoral campaign into actual governance practices proved, however, to be a challenging steeplechase. The campaigning strategy corresponded to a successful horizontal frame of cooperative action, but replicating it into the highly rigid hierarchical system of the City Hall required numerous negotiations and compromises. Society, at large, corresponds to a far less structured and, as such, more flexible system, where cooperation, to reach effective results, doesn't need to permeate the whole network, nor to ensure consistent loyalty and behavioral conformism. A hierarchical modus operandi, however, strains and get strained when cooperation doesn't translate into obedience or consensus. From the very beginning, the coalition with PSOE caused Ahora Madrid a significant effort to downgrade electoral commitments without betraying the trust of different groups composing the alliance. Internal tensions eventually ran their course and several city councilors, as well as other members publically expressed their disappointment and some of them drew back their support (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020).

The new administration championed three landmark priorities: morphing participatory infrastructure into the city management system, as conventional work processes, addressing the problem of air pollution by blending collaborative frameworks into ecology driven policies, and revitalizing a northern neighborhood around Chamartín railway station, to promote a socially fair urban development model (Janoschka & Mota, 2021; Mayne & Nicolini, 2020). By the end of its mandate, the alliance broke apart and Manuela Carmena announced a new electoral platform, called Más Madrid (More Madrid). The new structure retained the social movement type of infrastructure and spirit that Ahora Madrid previously epitomized, rejecting conventional party organization (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020).

Más Madrid gathered 505.000 votes, more than all other running parties, securing 19 seats in the City Council. PSOE won eight seats. PP secured 15 seats and Ciudadanos, the other center-right party, obtained 11. After joining the alliance with Vox, the far-right party pushing for an anti-immigrant and anti-feminist agenda, the right leaning assemblies secured majority and PP resumed the mayoral tradition (Janoschka & Mota, 2021; Mayne & Nicolini, 2020). Only the urban revitalization plan benefitted from continuity under the new administration. Measures regarding the air quality were stepped back, as the regional high court ruled that the project was adopted with no economic impact report, nor due public disclosure. Participatory budgeting processes were suspended, as well as local forums, originally instituted to give residents a chance to influence urban development in their proximal communities. However, local forums were recovered in early 2020, but with no budget to support their functional and growth activities. The City Observatory, a citizen run institution appointed to evaluate public policies and bring citizens' initiatives under the Local Council scrutiny, was practically dissolved. All three right leaning parties voted against its renewal. It was eventually reinstituted but with no citizen membership (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020).

Drawing on Jaques Rancière's dialectics (in Janoschka & Mota, 2021), who framed the political interplay as collation between the "politics", or the society at large, and the "police", with the former covering institutions and processes exercising power and establishing rules that shape the distribution of social roles, and techniques to legitimize their results, several studies argue that neoliberal enablers employ an allegedly aseptic and technical approach in imposing austerity measures, while designing, in fact, a wide order of domination pervading the consensual democracy systems (Janoschka & Mota, 2021). Building on these remarks, policies enabled by the Spanish right leaning parties, to exclude citizens from public decision making processes, may be understood as illustration of how efficiency and technocracy based discourses were actually weaponized in order to shrink citizens' influence over their lives, while bolstering hierarchical routes to prevent power surges from exclusivist nets of governance towards governed communities.

## From public-private partnerships to public-civil cooperation – and back again

New municipalisms endorsed a public agenda envisioned in sharp contrast to the austerity line of thought. They focused on citizens' right to

their city, an umbrella concept that highlights the public space as a multilayered web of living. Urban ecology, local economies, habitation conditions and, more broadly, the infrastructure of local welfare correspond to different veins of discovery and recovery actions aimed to create a livable city that mirrors residents' choices and needs (Janoschka & Mota, 2021; Martínez & Wissink, 2021; Russell, 2019). New municipalisms basically turned upside down the neoliberal mind frame that assumed citizens' continuous compliance and accommodation with regulations and effects employed by economic and political forces. The mobility and immigration discourse, which became central to the contemporary global capitalism, exemplifies the "capitalist self", to use Graeber's (2011) terminology. Under this delineation, personal efficiency is regarded as someone's ability to match market forces, by leaving places poorly adapted to support her or his needs to thrive or even survive, while making a living in more economically accommodating spaces, willingly paying the price of social and family dislocation, as well as accepting various sacrifices to ensure a delayed reward. New municipalisms interrupted this train of thought by proposing an alternative mind frame, stressing out citizens' right to their cities, which implied subordinating urban development to residents' needs, so that decision to leave would remain a choice and not a systemic imposition. Challenging neoliberal urban regimes triggered consistent experimentation and social innovation oriented to replace the traditional public-private partnerships with multi-actor public-civil collaborations (Medina-García, de la Fuente, & Van den Broeck, 2021).

Ahora Madrid designed various mechanisms to plug citizens into city management processes, to complement its massed efforts on digital participation through Decide Madrid platform. In March 2017, G-1000, a Citizen Summit, was organized to bring together 1000 randomly selected citizens, to discuss issues related to local budgeting. Pablo Soto regularly held public meetings and workshops to transfer knowledge on civil society routes of action for influencing public decisions. One of the most ambitious participatory projects, however, regarded the establishment of the City Observatory, a new institution designed to work as a local citizen parliament (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020). Citizen parliaments or assemblies became more common in the recent years, as they spread around the world in response to democracy and representation deficits (Peña-López, 2020; Smith, 2009).

Their underlying legitimacy rests upon the original imaginary of deliberative institutions. The foundational narrative envisions the political elected community as a miniature of the society it serves, ensuring, as such, that all social groups would have their interests protected (Dryzek, 2020).

One root problem encountered by representative democracies derives from the highly selective and inaccessible paths of political selection. Most of the politicians come from wealthy social strata, having no background or intimate knowledge on wide ranges of problems encountered by low and middle income citizens, nor on the issues faced by a large variety of professional, cultural or ethnic communities. As there is historical evidence that unrepresented or under-represented groups tend to become socially invisible, diminished or vilified, and problems they encounter get worse over time, citizen assemblies count as democratic corrections aimed to mirror and complement traditional deliberative institutions (Niessen & Reuchamps, 2022). Methodological approaches in designing a citizen parliament vary upon the specific scope of each assembly and the accommodating political context. The most common setting implies to randomly, though proportionally, select willing citizens coming from all social groups comprising the general population and assign them deliberative responsibilities and powers (Schuler, 2013).

The main challenge consists in calibrating the power of such an assembly, which is most commonly perceived as a threat by politicians. Providing a citizen parliament with too much power would doom it, as it lacks combative resources to protect itself from the attacks of traditional institutional actors. Limiting its power too much by assigning only consultative relevance to its resolutions would render it irrelevant for citizens. Designing its constituency and its prerogatives with a sharp focus on interactions has cornerstone value in preventing future conflicts between competing legitimacies (Buge & Vandamme, 2022; Schuler, 2013). Madrid administration sent 30.000 letters of invitation, aiming to select 49 residents to mandate as local representatives. More than 1.100 citizens expressed interest in joining the structure (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020). The City Observatory was mainly designed to counteract the effects produced by the high threshold imposed by the Spanish law for successful citizen legislative initiatives. Its members would review citizens' proposals, even though they lacked significant numbers in votes, being empowered to pass relevant initiatives under the scrutiny of the City Council. However, until the end of Ahora Madrid mandate, only one reunion took place (Peña-López, 2020).

Another channel to expand citizens' control over their proximal community rested in the constituency of 21 neighborhood forums. The hyper-local structures were aimed to empower residents to take a stand on policies and programs affecting the places they lived in. Their vote was meant to be binding for the City Council, but PP councilors vetoed the article securing citizens' effective influence while comparing such

committees with so called new soviet republics (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020). Along with these considerable attempts to build citizen centric structures aimed to ensure a lasting civil society blueprint into public decision making systems, numerous specialists and technical employees of the City Hall and its subordinated institutions were instructed to incorporate mixt procedures comprising in various forms of public consultation, referendums and project co-creation through working groups, in their usual workflow. These participatory and inclusive mechanisms account for what emerged as the multi-level governance model, based on formalizing multi-actor collaboration which bridge public agencies with individual and collective civil actors, knowledge institutional and informal producers, along with private actors. Multi-level governance is essentially a bottom-up model supporting city regimes oriented to ensure quality of life by correcting power asymmetries (Medina-García, de la Fuente, & Van den Broeck, 2021). It sharply contrasts the neoliberal post-political city management that ascribes unequal power as factual independent, and therefore, unquestionable variable.

Building participatory institutions, structures, and formal workflows is basically mandatory in order to secure sustainable citizen engagement in public governance, with all other measures and projects that are time limited, singular or otherwise volatile, serving to cultivate and maintain a citizen centric culture (Mayka, 2019; Cornwall, 2017). The rapid attack against the local forums and the City Observatory, by the right leaning parties, after 2019 elections, along with participatory budgeting suppression, illustrate the wide range of constrains faced by Ahora Madrid, which actually prevented a deep change of the urban regime, during its mandate. Previously enforced neoliberal economic limitation powerfully reproduced the status quo, strongly diminishing effects of dialogical and inclusionary projects. As Janoschka and Mota (2021) show, centralized financial control, although based on debt management, remained unchanged after the financial crisis, naturalizing a system that scaled up budgetary decisions, while scaling down their associated risks and social costs. With a budget surplus of €1.12 billion registered in 2017, Ahora Madrid administration was still subjected to the first post-democracy direct intervention of the central institutions into local accounts. Austerity financial mechanisms and legal provisions designed to ensure top-down control, from national to regional and local level effectively eroded the solidity of participatory structures (Janoschka & Mota, 2021).

On the one hand, financial requirements prevented both supplementation and professionalization of the institutional workforce. Participatory structures and their enablers were thus forced to follow start-

up inspired scenarios. Strongly based on personal motivations of the public servants and technical specialists, with little to no other endorsement than missionary driven determination, Madrid dialogical democracy was doomed to build its way inconsistently and with high personal costs, as it employed work overloads. As volatility and risks associated with capability development constitute the nemesis of start-up dynamics (Lundmark, Coad, Frankish,& Storey, 2020; Ma, Lang, Sun, & Singh, 2020), participatory mechanisms and institutions faced the same setbacks, being readily distorted after 2019 municipal elections. On the other hand, participation outcomes were strictly reduced through the national legal framework, which imposed authorization from the central government for local public consultations, limited their scope to municipal jurisdiction and prohibited any financial effects. Mainly, all mechanisms that could have challenged private companies as main beneficiaries of the social order were legally and politically effaced or prevented, producing a strong hostile environment for actors like Ahora Madrid, which were highly restricted in their ability to enact social policies (Janoschka & Mota, 2021).

These ideologically based and politically, legally and administratively built restrictions were most visible in the case of Madrid Nuevo Norte, the revitalization plan of the northern neighborhood around Chamartín railway station. It constituted the most ambitious project championed by the municipal administration, under the promise to create a livable district, with affordable instead of market-value homes. It was built on the controversial legacy of the Operación Chamartín, an urban development mega-project which was consistently fought back for the last 20 years by residents, as well as by NGOs, social movement networks and different political groups. The 1993 original version aimed to build 17.000 housing units and 100 hectares of business and office spaces. The main reasons for triggering strong public rejection were related to its predicted effects on aggravating affordable housing scarcity. Most commonly, the project was perceived as an amplifier of speculative real estate investments, maneuvers wildly regarded as contributory to the financial crisis and the following wave of evictions (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020).

Ahora Madrid recovered the mega-project under the promise of building affordable houses and offices for small and medium enterprises, which, in contrast to big, transnational corporations, are generally regarded as essential enablers and constituents of sustainable economies (Skuratovych, Lytvyn, Panova, Ovcharenko, & Hryhorevska, 2021; Higgs & Hill, 2019). Green areas, public transportation and cycle lanes were prioritized as markers of a socially fair model of urban development.

However, neoliberal legal-administrative framework restricted the administration capacity to extend ownership over buildings, to ensure the affordable infrastructure. First and foremost, the municipal housing company proved severely affected by the last 20 years of measures designed to draw back the power of the state, and lacked both technical expertise and sufficient property endowment to play a significant role in alleviating the housing crisis. Secondly, with no legal backup to enact compulsory purchases of private properties, Madrid could not follow Paris or Berlin models, where local governments enjoy larger autonomy from national administration (Janoschka & Mota, 2021).

Furthermore, Ahora Madrid policies to decrease evictions and ensure decent housing for its residents sharply conflicted with national and regional political agenda. The national government readily sold the stock of housing acquired during the financial crisis, to counteract the great foreclosure, to international investors for whom specific legal frameworks were designed, ensuring tax breaks that favored rent appropriation and real estate speculation. Additionally, Madrid scenario was different from Barcelona's, where the mayor built a bottom-up political organization, from local to national level. Ahora Madrid, an alliance mirroring a social movement, was politically marginalized in the national arena. Top-down political and legal constrains, emanated within a highly hierarchical national governance system, proved impossible to overstep at the local level (Janoschka & Mota, 2021). The municipal administration's agreement with the national one and the developer agency was, therefore, internally celebrated as a victory. However, the terms of the compromise caused many Ahora Madrid local councilors to draw back their support and leave the alliance, denouncing the limited actual provision of affordable homes. The final plan covered the construction of 10.500 housing units, with only 24 percent of them being protected by social policies to ensure different degrees of affordability (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020).

This critical reduction was perceived as a social and political betrayal. Beyond the factual loss and the failure to secure regular citizens' needs, the outcome contradicted the main definition of "real democracy", which was supposed to be enabled through multi-level multi-actor governance model. The operational definition of "real democracies" implies replacing contest democracy, focused on conflicts between elites who control power and resources, with deliberative democracy, an approach framed as a social process designed to produce collective understanding and agreement among various social actors, by solving problems through inclusive and accessible public decision making mechanisms, deliberately conceived to avoid patterns

of domination and to produce results which are perceived as aligned with community interests and values (Medina-García, de la Fuente, & Van den Broeck, 2021). Ahora Madrid local councilors' resignation was consistently framed in terms of disappointment with mayoral behavior, described as secretive and exclusive, as Carmena failed to consult all members of the alliance before formalizing the agreement with the national government and the developing agency, over the final version of the urban plan (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020).

However, the impact of multi-actor multi-level governance, aimed to enhance civil-public collaboration over private-public partnership, is better illustrated by the unfolding of another main project championed by Ahora Madrid administration, which implied tackling air pollution. It was built on a protocol previously developed and then abandoned by PP. The choice was meant to facilitate right oriented city councilors' approval over different collaborative approaches added as methodological ingredients. Various meetings, public and specialized consultations were held and multiple working groups were constituted in order to accommodate interests expressed by a variety of stakeholders, ranging from NGOs to business leaders, drivers, retailers and postal services, as well as citizens at large. The Air Quality Commission was appointed and joined by technical experts and politicians. Due to its significant public visibility, PP members progressively grew more open towards ecological measures, even though they started by discarding them as undue competitors to employment policies. The final plan included provisions to make Madrid a more walkable city, by lowering speed limits in traffic, and banning old, polluting cars in the city center, a measure subsequently reinforced through Madrid Central low-emissions zone. After 2019 elections, the local government suspended the low emission zone policy, but huge protests emerged and only five days later, fines for polluting vehicles passing through Madrid central area were reinstalled (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020).

The unfolding of the two projects, regarding the urban revitalization plan and the one tackling air pollution, highlights a nuanced picture over the efficacy of multi-level governance. On the one hand, Madrid Nuevo Norte illustrates an example of partial failure in multi-actor collaboration, with public and private partners securing a high influence position in shaping the plan, while civil collaboration was limited to partially correct different decisions in territorial planning. On the other hand, Madrid Central low-emissions zone reflects a case of successful multi-level governance, where ulterior institutional and political attacks were counteracted through collective street action. Citizens' ability to protect a product of civil-public

collaboration, but not others, like local forums or the City Observatory, raises further questions regarding explanatory factors accounting for the efficacy of bottom-up politics.

## Horizontalism triggered constrains in building participatory urban regimes

Multi-level governance, based on public-civil collaborations, accounts for methodological models developed to embody horizontalism in public management and decision making. Significantly, horizontalism may be defined as a fusion product, bridging direct democracy, as political philosophy, with non-hierarchical organization, as structural design (Ancelovici, 2016). Direct democracy was historically rejected and confined to marginal sub-cultures, prevented from socially expanding its vocabulary and, even more so, its pragmatics, tools, mechanisms and experimentation designs. The advent of the internet triggered a broad rejuvenation of the long forgotten body of political thought. Technophiles, equating digital decentralized networks with prefigurative spaces illustrating how democracy should look like, were among the first non-marginal social actors who recovered a dignified understanding over direct democracy and embarked in collective endeavors to develop its frameworks, as structures allowing for its direct experience (Smith & Martín, 2022). It took the anti-austerity protests, however, to expand both its social acceptability and its methodological imaginary. Contestatory actions were joined by tech activists endorsing a political perspective rooted in movements for hacking, free and open source programming, where commons based economies and communities were most pragmatically envisioned and experientially produced. As meeting contexts for various post- and anti-hegemonic social groups (Kioupkiolis, 2021; Kioupkiolis, 2018), anti-austerity protests became the first consistent spillovers of horizontal models of organization and collective decision making (Ancelovici, 2016).

One of the main veins of horizontalism consists in interrupting the normalized view on politics as national and international state-centric institutional phenomena. Challenging both, authoritarianism and neoliberalism, horizontalism delves in prefiguring systems based on truth-telling, collective participation and collective decision making and action (d'Auvergne, 2018; Ancelovici, 2016). As d'Auvergne (2018) argues, this socio-political orientation moves forward from the capitalist self, defined as inviolable property, and the neoliberal self, envisioned as business, to recover community as instrumental force to counteract mechanisms related

to cheap labor exploitation, and the expulsion of people from jobs, territory and biosphere, which shrink individual autonomy and someone's control over personal life, rendering massive social groups as invisible, pervasively not counted in neoliberal policy making (p.2). This line of thought defines debt and bankruptcy as anthropological systems historically used to extract someone from her or his web of significant social relations and social geography, in order to dispose of the extracted person or group as a tool (Graeber, 2011).

Truth-telling, as collective practice of self-assertion, pervaded liberating social movements, whose members used storytelling to counteract narratives which normalized oppression (Poletta,1998a, 1998b). Within the field of work, for example, shifting the power relations in communication and giving a voice to the culturally silenced, challenged the neoliberal storyline demanding someone to be continuously happy with her or his tasks, employers and customers, to be constantly concerned about the wellbeing of the employing organization and come with solutions discovered in her or his spare time, while taking a bath or washing dishes. The narrative standardizing the quality of work as such, was redefined as totalitarian tendency to dispose not only of the paid time, mind and abilities of an employee, but also of her or his subjectivity, conditioning her or his social mobility and self-esteem of meeting employer's demands, on a basis of continuous fright over the possibility of being unemployed, collecting debt or not making enough money (d'Auvergne, 2018). Instrumentation of fear allows an employer to ask not just for intellectual or physical work, but also to demand affective work, which structures the whole persona of an individual, pervading most of her or his choices, on a wide range of life aspects, from eating behaviors, to social and household related decisions (Graeber, 2011).

The horizontalist principle of truth-telling transversally shaped processes regarding transparency in public decision making, as well as designing participatory mechanisms, methodologies and institutions. The municipalist narrative endorsed by Ahora Madrid administration rooted truth-telling as working principle for solving a wide array of urban, social and political problems. Unfolding knowledge about administrative functioning and its processes, along with large sets of public information, had cornerstone value in strategies employed to engage Madrilenians in city co-management. Beyond and above horizontalism, this perspective is consensually accepted as sound, across most of democratic political and administrative fields of knowledge. However, the implications of truth-telling go further than political accountability. Mechanisms such as

participatory budgeting, for example, are envisioned as community truth-telling channels, aimed to counteract or verify and correct developmental administrative, political and private projects, which are traditionally imposed by elites as top-down external expressions of what a community needs. Multi-actor multi-level governance, based on wide civil-public collaborations, are also methodological iterations of truth-telling as universal right and practice, allowing for taking into account a variety of perspectives and needs which were previously invisible or constrained to limited spaces of expression and usage.

Understanding why structures like local forums and the City Observatory, which were based on truth-telling practices, allowing citizens to voice their perspective and to instrumentally act on a shared vision, were weakened after 2019 local municipal elections, while Madrid low-emissions zone, also a horizontalist project, was protected, requires a more in-depth analysis over relational dynamics implied by horizontal frameworks. First and foremost it's significant that the right-leaning coalition sought to completely disband the assemblies and to suspend fines for polluting vehicles entering the city center. These options were intended as final actions of erasure, with no negotiation window over reformation or amendment. After the overnight announcement of the planned course of action, however, the ruling parties tempered their previous decisions and chose a different approach, designed to weaken these structures, instead of completely dismantling them. The local forums had their budget cut, while the City Observatory was re-established with no citizen constituency, preserving, as members, only local councilors and technical employees, while also vacating all binding powers of the institution (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020).

These choices reflect a strong vertically-formatting endeavor, oriented not so much against assemblies, as functional structures, but highly opposed to their horizontal functioning. In regard to fines for polluting vehicles, provided to ensure the operational efficacy of the project regarding the air quality, it must be noted that deciding to suspend them targeted an outcome of a previous horizontal process. Residents rallied to defend this outcome and restrictions were reinstalled within five days from the original decision. A product of horizontal processes proved, therefore, to be more resilient than horizontal processes themselves. This contrasts with findings highlighted in participatory studies, which stress the volatile nature of punctual outcomes and advocate for building more durable mechanisms and processes through institutional design, in order to enhance sustainable citizen participation (Niessen & Reuchamps, 2022; Peña-López, 2020; Mayka, 2019; Smith, 2009).

The surprising contradiction may be, however, explained by taking into account that literature on sociopolitical trust distinguishes between four socio-political typologies. Distrusters are depicted as individualistic libertarians, manifesting either antipathy or apathy towards state politics, oriented towards maximizing their benefits, with no sensitivity towards either traditional state institutions or the common good. Their options are explained by low political trust and low social trust, where political trust accounts for subjective confidence in the good will and competence of state actors as hierarchical symbols and enablers, while social trust is defined as confidence in the good will and competence of peers, broadly encompassing regular citizens, with no recognition as leaders (Williams, 2020). Distrusters were the main beneficiaries, as well as the champions of neoliberal politics. Hierarchalists, however, manifest high political trust and low social trust, favoring elites' ruling over masses and strong vertical structures, designed to prevent power surges from small groups of elected, towards general or mass communities. They stress out the instrumental and moral value of obedience, promoting disciplined execution of top down orders. Hierarchalists are generally depicted as prone to fascist rhetorical patterns. As Williams (2020) shows, both distrusters and hierarchicalists are socially pessimistic. This may explain, at least to some extent, the 2019 coalition of PP and Ciudadanos, center-right parties, perusing a neoliberal agenda, with Vox, a far-right party, focused on anti-immigrant and anti-feminist themes.

In contrast, trusters and horizontalists are socially optimistic typologies. Trusters display both high political and social trust, endorsing policies rooted in social democracy. They assign state institutions a reformatory role, aimed to shape and lead civil society towards a more fairly and morally just organized interaction. Faith in elites and hierarchies is curved through mission attribution, appointing power actors to defend interests of the vulnerable and to ensure the social compromise, so that various groups would learn to respect each other and peacefully live together. Trusters, as well as hierarchicalists, share a top-down world vision, favoring authoritarian mechanisms. Horizontalists, however, have high social trust, but low political trust. They are left-leaning libertarians, favoring extra-institutional action and willing to replicate extra-institutional dynamics into political and administrative functioning, resisting all vertical, authoritarian methodologies (Williams, 2020). Ahora Madrid, from its constituency as a confluence, to its electoral agenda, resembled a strong horizontalist actor. The coalition with PSOE made sense on the shared base of high social trust, but the two structures contrasted sharply on envisioning the value of citizen participation and on calibrating efforts to build open

collaborative institutional infrastructure, allowing regular citizens to influence the city management.

The dispute over Madrid Nuevo Norte project, when several Ahora Madrid local councilors resigned, while accusing the mayor of political and social betrayal, may very well be read as a strong sanction over transgressing horizontalist principles and allowing vertically structured processes to shape the project. The main difficulty in designing horizontal frameworks, however, is rooted in the specific interactions fostered through open egalitarian collaboration. Hierachalists and trusters eagerly exclude a wide array of actors from decision making and management processes, ensuring as such, a fast, although faulty and more often than not, contested route of development. Distrusters, in turn, act differently, accordingly to their power position. When wielding a high level of power, more commonly, through financial leverage, they are able to smoothly interact with both hierarchicalists and trusters, in order to ensure compromises fitted to their growth objectives. Their rhetorical approach, aimed to enable covert partnerships, regularly consists in fierce critique of traditional vertical state institutions as corrupt, incapable and outdated. Their political enablers are, therefore, pushed to incorporate distrusters' objectives in national or local governmental plans, as proof of their modernity and good will. This observation explains, for example, why left-leaning governments in Eastern Europe actually passed more liberal and neoliberal measures than right-leaning governments, trying to rehabilitate themselves after the fall of URSS (Magnin & Nenovsky, 2022). When lacking power, distrusters act passively on the political field, focusing on individual life-scenarios and manifesting disinterest in all projects promising social change. Oppressive consciousness, defined as a system of thought allowing someone to be aware of how a social apparatus diminishes her or his quality of life, but makes her or him disinclined to act for change (Freire, 1968/2005), describes low power distrusters' sociopolitical behavior.

Horizontal processes and frameworks are, tautologically fitted for horizontalits, but their position within these structures is easily jeopardized by other actors' interaction patterns. Hierachicalists and trusters solve diversity blockages by excluding diversity itself. Powerful distrusters allow any amount of diversity as long as it is vertically framed to serve their interests. Powerless distrusters extract themselves from diversity. Horizontal processes, however, presume horizontalits to graciously and fairly take into account all typologies, while making efforts to engage powerless distrusters. Dismantling horizontal institutions by vertically restructuring them, after 2019 Madrid elections, may seem surprisingly easy, if compared to how

citizens fought against the new administration's decision to overturn the air quality program. Although neoliberal dynamics may account for this specific vulnerability (Janoschka & Mota, 2021; Martínez & Wissink, 2021), the explanation may also reside in the rate of horizontalits populating and supporting these horizontally designed institutions, and their power to counteract vertical centralization, while being receptive, by design, to other typologies' patterns of interaction.

Significantly, the dynamics may be read as depending of horizontalists' estimation over their strategic allies. Powerless distrusters, as anti-authoritarian sub-group, are generally assigned as the main beneficiaries of horizontal participatory structures, although a great amount of efforts is needed to move them from low social trust to better suited positions for tentative engagement. During crisis, powerless distrusters prove, however, to be weak combatants, even though they previously experienced some beneficial outcome of their participation. This places horizontalism on a paradoxical position, allowing its structures to survive as long as they are vertically maintained through horizontal leadership. As Madrid experience shows, this is, however, not the case for horizontally produced outcomes and products. Actually, most of the social, political and civil rights which are now clichés across democratic states, started as horizontalists' radical demands (Pugh, 2009).

Based on this observation, it may be implied that society at large accommodates a sufficient ratio of horizontalits to ensure their reformatory blueprint, but this rate is rarely reached within institutional communities, comprising in technical employees, political enablers and their supporters. The risk of vertically re-structuring horizontal organization is, for that matter, sharply articulated within the anarchist critique on 15M movement. Flood (2014), for example, predicted the vulnerability of participatory outcomes of the protests, as participants either lacked, or rejected any background linking them to previous traditions in designing and experiencing horizontal models of organization. The risks of reproducing prejudices and biased asymmetrical relations characterizing the political system they opposed was significant, as protesters engaged in a process of building everything from sketch, ignoring the lessons derived from previous failed horizontal projects (Flood, 2014).

## General discussion and conclusions

Ahora Madrid mandate is considered one of the most relevant examples of municipalist politics in action (Smith & Martín, 2022; Martínez

& Wissink, 2021). Therefore, the participatory experiment it ran is generally contrasted over progressive ideologies, to mark overlaps, deviations and hybridization points, in order to answer the question regarding the feasibility of collaborative co-management models as urban regimes (Janoschka, & Mota, 2021; Medina-García, de la Fuente, & Van den Broeck, 2021; Royo, Pina, & Garcia-Rayado, 2020). As direct democracy jeopardizes social orders built on vertical worldviews and denies elites' right to monopolize power and resources, proposals anticipating multi-level governance were traditionally repressed and framed as utopic, impossible, highly dysfunctional, if not even unconceivable endeavors.

Significantly, the label of inconceivableness is generally assigned to demands articulated within the melting pot of social movements, as top-down prophylactic inhibition, preventing citizens to concentrate collective efforts and knowledge in such manifestos. If the unconceivable is conceived, as it happened by turning 15M grievances into a winning political project, questions regarding ideological purity arouse from the inside, and queries related to efficacy are interposed from the outside. Scrutinizing the efficacy of collaborative and participatory politics constitutes a yet new field of investigation, far from coalescing enough theoretical understanding, field observation or empirical verification to allow building a consensual view. The scarce literature to date explains both participatory democracy hybridization and its limited efficacy in terms of political, economic, institutional and administrative constrains rooted in the neoliberal design of states and cities (Janoschka, & Mota, 2021; Martínez & Wissink, 2021; Romanos & Sádaba, 2016).

The present study argues that frictions encountered during drafting and implementing collaborative city and state projects, may also be explained – and partially managed – by taking into account the types of sociopolitical trust expressed by all involved actors. As horizontally designed city regimes, new municipalist strategies necessarily bridge distrusters, hierarchicalists, trusters and horizontalists. Although horizontal regimes mirror horizontalists' worldview, a horizontal dictatorship is a contradiction in terms, as it denies deliberative processes specifically designed to prevent power asymmetries. While neoliberal approaches started by favoring distrusters, it also triggered a powerful response, shaped in the revival of hierarchicalists. The resilience of horizontal frameworks as integrative parts of city or state regimes might depend on horizontalists' distribution in institutions, and also on the socio-cultural portrayal of the society at large. While empowering and engaging powerless distrusters represents one of the main instrumental objectives of horizontal regimes, this is also a great source

of temporal vulnerability, during periods of vertically political restructuring, under the influence of powerful distrusters, hierarchicalists or trusters.

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