

## **Participatory Motivations in Advisory Councils: Exploring Different Reasons to Participate**

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The most common participatory institution has been insufficiently analysed: associationally based institutions often exist at any government level (from the neighbourhood to the state), but have received only scant academic attention. This paper analyses these advisory councils (ACs) in Spain, in order to understand why their participants continue to attend the meetings, given the apparently limited attractiveness these institutions have. The analysis, based on results from a survey of participants ( $n = 569$ ) in a sample of ACs ( $n = 70$ ), shows that a diverse set of motivations exist (knowledge, influence, recognition and civic duty) and that the relevance of each of them varies within different types of councils and for different groups of participants. The results are relevant to the general discussion as to why people participate in different types of participatory institutions and in discussing how participatory inequalities appear in them.

Advisory councils; participatory democracy; associative democracy

## The 'Ugly Ducklings' of Participatory Governance?

Sectorial and territorially based advisory councils (ACs, hereinafter) are the most common of all existing participatory devices in many countries (Aarsæther et al., 2017; Campos & González, 1999; Hendriks, Bolitho, & Foulkes, 2013; Zaremborg, Guarneros Meza, & Lavalle, 2017). However, differently from other innovative mechanisms developed over previous decades, their more limited media visibility and the generalised perception that in most cases they perform a somewhat ritual role, has resulted in very limited research about their development and results.

Well-known international research is quite limited (Fung, 2004) and often covers only one single experience, or a small set of them (Blakeley, 2010; Cornwall, 2008; Navarro, 2004). The reasons why ACs have been under-represented in research are probably diverse. The fact that they are not a recent 'democratic innovation' (Smith, 2009) but an institution which is already routine in public administrations, is most likely a central one. The generalised perception that their policy role or scope is quite limited (Sintomer & De Maillard, 2007, p. 519) contributes to the limited attractiveness of their image. For these reasons, ACs could be considered the 'ugly ducklings': they are part of the general family of participatory democracy, but they are not perceived to be as groundbreaking and as transformative as democratic innovations, such as participatory budgeting or mini-publics (Gül, 2019). Thus we do not necessarily consider them as a democratic innovation, but we claim that they can be analysed using the same analytical frame and posing quite similar democratic challenges.

However, this generalised scepticism and lack of rigorous knowledge does not imply that these councils are being abandoned. In fact, they continue to have a role at different policy levels and areas, in both Europe and the Americas (Escobar, Gibb, Kandlik, & Weakley, 2018; Zaremborg et al., 2017). In the Spanish case, thousands of ACs exist (see below), which means that a few tens of thousands of people are active in them. Why do so many people participate in institutions that perform an apparently limited policy role? How do motivations change in different settings and among different publics? Understanding who the participants are and why they participate highlights crucial debates about the democratic roles of participatory institutions and the dilemmas they pose to political inequalities. This paper shows that ACs are not an ideal scenario for those preoccupied with equality, but this is not due to inequalities developing within the ACs, but because their composition almost completely excludes the lower classes.

This paper develops as follows. The following section aims to clarify the universe of analysis, making a brief overview of previous research into ACs. The third section presents the central research question of the paper and the motivations of participants, outlining some of the main contributions made by previous research. The fourth section presents the methodology and data collection strategies used. The final part shows the empirical analysis, before closing the paper with some concluding remarks and implications.

## **ACs in Comparative Perspective**

### *Defining the Universe of Analysis*

ACs have received several names in different countries and public administrations. In academic research, we find diverse names according to the main research question addressed or the main theoretical tradition followed. For example, the tradition of 'associative democracy' is more focused on the articulation of a variety of social interests and demands, which should be channelled complementing state policy-making. In this tradition, Hirst talks about 'councils' (1994, p. 187) and also of 'associational bodies'. Furthermore, there is a 'participatory' tradition which connects them to all the literature on participatory democracy (Fung, 2004). Finally, in recent decades we can also find the expression 'deliberative councils' for these types of institutions (Cornwall, 2008; Schattan, 2006).

Considering this diversity, we prefer to use 'advisory councils' for several reasons. There is some consensus around the idea of calling these institutions 'councils', as collective bodies including different actors, particularly representatives of associations within a given policy area, instead of citizens individually (Smith, 2009, p. 2). Also, we remark the 'advisory' character because this is their most common role: public decision-makers consult these institutions which, normally, do not have any capacity to make binding decisions. Their advisory style may be quite diverse, from consensual agreements to formally voted reports or information provision. Thus the concept 'advisory councils' marks the collective nature of these settings and the common advisory relationship with public authorities.

Our universe includes bodies that have all the following characteristics:

- They have a formal existence, which links them to some kind of public administration. The council may have been created from above or from below, but it has been recognised by a public administration as a legitimate partner and space for public debate.
- They have been created to have a permanent character and not to solve a particular issue in a given time frame.
- They include a degree of citizen presence (individual or associational). This excludes councils whose members are exclusively politicians and/or experts.

### *Spanish ACs in Comparative Perspective*

ACs appeared in Spain in the 1980s with the development of the post-Franco democratic system. In the 80s and the 90s, ACs mushroomed in the central, regional and municipal administrations and expanded from central socio-economic policies to other policy areas (e.g., youth, women, sport, education and others) (Navarro, 2004). They include territorial and sectorial councils. Territorial are those dedicated to all the policies in a given territory (most often in a medium to large city). They are generalist in their political scope and organisations and sometimes individual citizens are represented there. Sectorial councils are those related to specific policies or specific sectors of the population, in which associative groups are the most common

participants (together with politicians and public servants) and their work tends to be more related to real policy-making. Sometimes they also include experts or representatives of other public administrations. The number of participants representing each organisation (or type of) is normally established by laws or local regulations. The final participants are most frequently appointed by the leadership of each specific organisation.

In organisational terms, they always have a plenary (with numbers ranging from 20 to 80 people in most cases) that meets a few times a year and sometimes other more operational structures like working commissions or an executive committee. Meetings include information and discussion, with many of them using voting procedures and approving specific reports. The issues discussed can be suggested by authorities, or by the members themselves. In general, their visibility beyond the participants is low, but the very large number of them means that a sensible minority of the population has at some point participated in any one of them (Navarro, Cuesta, & Font, 2009).

There are no recent studies mapping and analysing Spanish ACs, neither does a study comparing different territorial levels exist. The important contribution of Navarro covered a few local cases in the late 80s (2004) and some case studies based on qualitative data have been conducted at all levels, often linked to the study of social policies (Rodríguez & Ajangiz, 2007). These studies focus on how participation is performed in these settings and its impacts, but they lack systematic cross-case comparisons and a common analytical framework (Bherer, Fernández-Martínez, García-espín, & Jiménez, 2016).

Varieties of ACs, receiving different names and having changing types of participants and dynamics, are a common institution found in most of Europe (Aarsæther et al., 2017; Escobar et al., 2018; Fobé, Brans, Vancoppenolle, & Vandamme, 2013; Sintomer & De Maillard, 2007), the United States (Cooper & Musso, 1999), many Latin American countries (Schattan, 2006; Serdült & Welp, 2015), as well as several countries in Asia (Campos & González, 1999).

The most well-known study about them (Fung, 2004) claimed the crucial role that these institutions could have, especially for incorporating the most excluded social sectors. However, beyond this apparently largely exceptional case, the greatest part of the limited comparative research points to their limited policy influence and almost purely symbolic role (Blakeley, 2010; Cooper & Musso, 1999; Hendriks et al., 2013), with almost no discussion about their relationship to social exclusion.

### *The Diversity of Participatory Motivations*

The motivations of participants on participatory institutions had not been consistently analysed until recently. Neblo, Esterling, Kennedy, Lazer, and Sokhey (2010) point to a set of individual and institutionally related variables that become important predictors of participation. Two recent analyses (Aitamurto, Landemore, & Saldivar, 2017; Gustafson & Hertting, 2017) agree on distinguishing between socio-tropic or ego-tropic policy related motives and also on the inclusion of the

psychological benefits of learning, enjoying the activity itself or performing a civic duty, an explanatory factor also included in Mazeaud and Talpin (2010). Yetano and Royo (2017) claim that, in fact, personal contact is the most crucial variable to mobilise citizens for offline participation.

Additional inspiration can be found in research about participation from below. This has also questioned the idea that influencing policy should be a prevailing motivation for participation, since the likelihood of our particular participation being decisive is too small. Instead, it has argued that fulfilling social and civic (individual) needs are probably more important reasons for most citizens to act (Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 1995). This previous research is mostly based on individual decisions to participate. However, participating in an AC is a mixture of individual and organisational motivations: we have individuals participating who are investing their time and energies, but in many cases these participants are professionals that are representing organisations. As such, the final decision to be there is a mixture between the needs of their organisation and their individual time management and constraints. Jennstal (2018) has shown that not only personal factors but also situational ones are crucial to understand participation in deliberative settings. This means that we should also consider arguments from organisational theories. For example, research into protest and social movements provides another interesting set of inspiring ideas. Gamson (1975) makes a central distinction of what participants and their organisations gain from their acts: policy influence is as important as recognition in being the central social actors in the field.

In sum, all this research suggests one central idea: there are several sets of reasons as to why participants in ACs could be interested in participating: to influence policy, to learn (and interact) with others, to gain organisational recognition as relevant policy actors and to fulfil their role as good citizens.<sup>1</sup>

The social distribution of these reasons among citizens should not be random and will differ considerably depending on the characteristics of individuals, organisations and institutions. The explanatory factors as to why each of these different motivations is more important in each case could be extremely diverse, but there is at least a central distinction regarding two sets of factors. First, reasons related to the characteristics of each of the

participants, including both their personal characteristics (socio-demographic and attitudinal), as well as those regarding the type of actor they represent (politician, public officer, association, expert, etc.).

Second, attributing an important explanatory role to institutional design is a powerful tradition in the research on participatory institutions (Landwehr & Holzinger, 2010; Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2017). Design choices have consequences for the scope, bias and quality of participation. Thus the ACs' organisational rules could also become a key factor to understanding their existence and, as a result, the motivations to be active in them. For example, some ACs use formal voting to make decisions, while others mostly use participants' assent (not explicit objection made). Since Mansbridge (1980), the problems of small groups forging fake consensus have

been established and as a result, we will analyse if having voting provisions may be a signal that conflict and plurality of visions are not hidden and some real debate and decisions are being made.<sup>2</sup>

In short, we expect both individual and institutionally based characteristics to be influential in understanding the different weights that each type of motivation will hold.

### *Methodology: Data Collection Strategies*

This section presents the overall research methodological strategy, focusing specifically on the survey used throughout the paper. In doing so, it also presents some descriptive characteristics regarding the presence of ACs throughout Spain.

The first step was to develop a multilevel mapping of the existing ACs at national level, regional level (17 regions) and in the 25 municipalities with more than 250,000 inhabitants (or more than 175,000 and are the capital of their provinces) in Spain. Thus, an initial search, mostly based on web scraping, has been the source for the creation of a General Data Set (GD). This includes basic information (subject, territorial scope) on all the ACs which exist in Spain within these administrations. Table A1 in the appendix includes the main results: 2013 ACs or an average of about 47 councils for each of these administrations. Apparently, the number decreases in smaller administrations: 123 for the Spanish central administration, an average of 74 for each region and about 25 in each city.<sup>3</sup> Regarding the policy fields, there is a presence of ACs in almost every policy field, with an especially high concentration in two sectors: the economy (399, 19.8%) and the environment (285, 14.1%). The other large category belongs to the territorial councils (303, 15%), which only exist at local level.

Two additional data collection strategies were followed. First, departing from the GD, we have mined the web looking for the constitutional documents and functioning rules of a selection of ACs (101 cases) with information regarding a limited number of indicators on mission and aims, composition, organisational structure and transparency. The coding of the institutional characteristics of these ACs has been developed by three coders, using a common codebook and holding several meetings to discuss and correct potential differences.

Second, for the same ACs (101 cases), we have conducted an on-line survey of the council members in order to quantify the subjective side of their experience (perceptions of the performance of ACs).<sup>4</sup> This has produced a Satisfaction Survey Data Set (SSD), including individual information of 569 individuals in 70 different ACs at national (n = 5), regional (n = 35) and municipal (n = 30) levels.

To select the ACs, we have limited the policy scopes covered, by selecting just one subject and one specific type of council in each of the following AC segments: (i) traditional social policies (education); (ii) new policies (environment); (iii) identities (immigration); (iv) territorially based councils (city centre district councils). This typology is based on the very basic distinction between sectorial and territorial councils, as well as on the previously discussed distinction between corporatist and

pluralistic councils. Given the extremely wide array of policies covered by these councils today, and the increasing importance of the politics of identities, we further distinguished pluralistic ACs between new policies and identities.<sup>5</sup>

To further limit the number of cases and to obtain a sample where all the territorial levels are adequately represented, for each of the four topics we have selected all cases at state and regional levels and one municipality representing each region (selected at random). In the case of territorial ACs, all of them being of submunicipal scope, we have selected the Central District Councils for all the municipalities in our sample that have this kind of participatory device. Table 1 shows the distribution of cases selected initially to take part in our AC members' satisfaction survey.

The survey was developed from November 2017 to the end of March 2018 and included up to five follow-up reminders. Fieldwork started with an initial contact with the administration in charge of the AC, suggesting two potential ways to distribute the on-line questionnaire. In some cases, the administration provided the email addresses of participants, so that follow-up reminders could be sent directly to them. This method was used in 27 ACs,<sup>6</sup> where we reached a response rate of 30.3% of the participants. In a second group of 43 ACs, the AC administration itself sent a link to the on-line questionnaire to each member of the council. In these cases, we did follow-ups with the administration but had no direct contact with participants, achieving a lower 12.5% response rate among them. Finally, in a third group of ACs (31 cases) it was impossible to reach the participants. This group includes ACs that continue to exist formally but which have had no activity for years, as well as others that explicitly refused to cooperate and a third group of poorly institutionalised ones where it was impossible to establish contact with anyone in charge after several attempts (see Tables A2 and A3 in the appendix for fieldwork outcomes and response rates for the survey).

The results of the analyses presented in the next section are based on the 569 respondents to the satisfaction survey. As Table A3 in the appendix shows, they represent a significant variety of councils, organisations and individuals. Some categories represent a large size of the respondents in each of the variables (e.g., members of regional councils, members of education councils and members of associations), but the data includes all types of respondents (from public officers to trade union members and policy experts) and of councils, including representation of the smallest categories (e.g., national councils). Comparing the distribution of the surveyed members to the composition of the councils participating

Table 1. Initial SSD sample distribution.

Strata	Municipalities	Regions	State	Total
School Councils	13	17	1	31
Immigration Councils	6	11	2	19
General Environment Councils	10	15	3	28
Central District Councils	23	–	–	23

General Total	52	43	6	101
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in the survey according to their rules (Table A4 in the appendix), only members from associations and NGOs are slightly overrepresented at the expense of public officers and representatives from other councils. Thus the picture that the survey results provide, adequately represents the reality of the 70 councils analysed in our study.<sup>7</sup>

The analysis develops as follows. First, we describe who answered the survey, providing a picture of the sociological profile of participants and of the sectors largely excluded from it. Second, we review the motivations alleged by participants and develop a principal component analysis of the results to reduce the answers provided to four main dimensions. Finally, we take the two most central of these dimensions and explore the main individual and contextual factors related to them through a regression analysis.

### *Results: Who Participates in ACs and Why?*

Who participates in ACs? Before exploring the analysis of the motivations for participating in ACs in Spain, we will have a look at how they are selected to take part in the plenary of the councils, which are their roles in the council and their socio-demographic features. The rules of the councils provide the composition and the procedures for selecting the members in the plenary in most of the cases (90% of ACs in our sample). Most AC members are appointed by the collectives they represent (80%), while in another 12% of cases the representation is explicit in the norms (i.e., the school director, the university dean, etc.). Other selection procedures as the election among peers or random selection are residual (1.3% each).

The average number of members in the plenary of the councils included in our sample is 48, with the size ranging from 34 members in the case of territorial councils, to 54 in school councils. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the satisfaction survey's respondents according to the role that they play in the councils. The most populated group corresponds to members representing civil society organisations, including associations and NGOs, trade unions and business organisations. Those profiles account for just under two thirds of the councils with representatives from administration and people of recognised standing accounting for the remaining third.

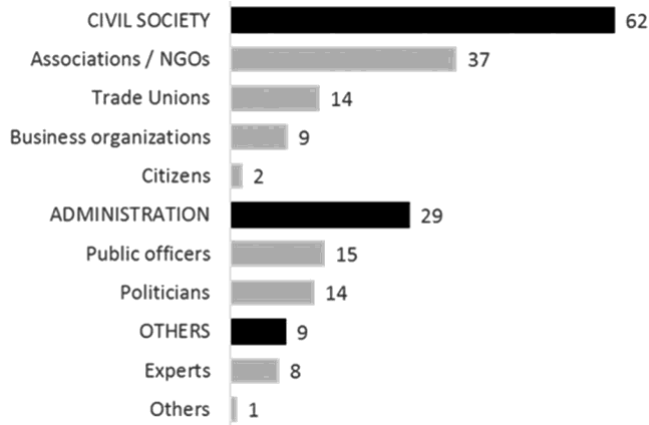


Figure 1. Role of members in the council. Source: Satisfaction survey of AC members.

Table 2 compares the socio-demographic profiles of all the ACs' participants and the members of civil society with the comparable figures of the Spanish population. AC members are less diverse than society as a whole, and some categories are clearly overrepresented. The typical profile of an AC member is a man in his 50s, who is a college graduate and working full time in a highly qualified occupation. Women and people under 45 years old are significantly under-represented in the ACs, but the biggest exclusions are related to the education and labour status of the participants. This lack of 'descriptive' representativeness holds true when we consider those members exclusively representing civil society organisations. Members from civil society mirror society as a whole slightly better than those members who represent administration in socio-economic variables but do worse with demographic ones.

Why do AC members participate? Our analysis is based on answers to a battery of items where respondents were asked to assess the importance of different factors when explaining their participation in the council (Table 3). According to the answers provided, the most important reasons for participating in an AC are to fulfil a civic duty and to increase their knowledge and information on the positions of other participants. These are items that obtain a means of over 4 on a five-point scale. Other more pragmatic reasons, such as maintaining contact with the policy-makers or gaining symbolic recognition, are ranked much lower.

To make comparisons between groups simpler and more meaningful, we have conducted a principal component analysis (PCA) with the aim of reducing the information obtained with those seven items to obtain a smaller number of underlying factors.<sup>8</sup> The

Table 2. AC Members' profile compared to population distribution.

	All	Civil society	Spanish population	Difference	Difference
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	members (n = 569) %	members (n = 354) %	figures %	ce all %	nce CS %
Sex					
Male	60	62	49	+11	+13
Female	40	38	51	-11	-13
Age					
18-29	3	3	15	-12	-12
30-44	17	17	28	-11	-11
45-59	60	59	27	+33	+32
60 and above	20	21	30	-10	-9
Education					
Up to primary	1	0	21	-20	-21
Secondary	13	18	50	-37	-32
Higher education	86	82	29	+57	+53
Labour status					
Employed	83	78	50	+33	+28
Unemployed	2	2	9	-7	-7
Inactive	15	20	41	-26	-21
Occupation					
Directors and managers	19	17	4	+15	+13
Scientific technicians and professionals in health and education	62	56	18	+44	+38
Technicians, support professionals	13	18	11	+2	+7
Others	6	9	67	-61	-58

Source: Satisfaction survey of AC members, Continuous Population Register and Active Population Survey (INE, 2018).

Table 3. Importance of reasons for participating in the council. Can you indicate to what extent the factors below are important to you or your organisation in being part of the advisory council? Scale: 1 – ‘Absolutely not important’ to 5 – ‘Absolutely important’.

I am part of the advisory council in order to ...	n	Mean	SD
... fulfil a civic duty	531	4.10	.89
... gain insight into the vision and views of others	531	4.05	.75
... increase my knowledge or that of my organisation	531	3.98	.93
... be able to do networking	528	3.76	.90
... influence the policy	528	3.70	1.09
... so that my organisation may be acknowledged by the administration and other actors in the field	531	3.31	1.15
... maintain contact with the policy-makers	528	3.30	1.12

Source: Satisfaction survey of AC members.

factorability of the seven items was examined, starting with the analysis of their correlation matrix.<sup>9</sup> All of them correlated at least .3 with more than one of the remaining items, suggesting reasonable factorability. Furthermore, the KMO measure of sampling adequacy was .783, above the commonly recommended value of .6, and Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2(21) = 1424.75, p = .000$ ). Finally, the communalities were all above .6 (see Table 4). All these figures indicated that PCA was suitable for our data.

Only the first factor had an initial eigenvalue over one. However, we decided to keep the second and third factors (eigenvalues .9 and .8) because they added more than 10% of the variance explained. The fourth factor, with an eigenvalue of .7, was kept because it adequately contributed to explaining the behaviour of the variable Civic Duty that was not very well represented in the three factor solution and added almost another 10% to the final figure of the total variance explained, of 83.8%.

Three items loaded into Factor 1. We labelled it as ‘Knowledge’, as all of them are related to gaining information and knowledge, including meeting and having access to other actors in the field. The two items that loaded into Factor 2 are being in contact with policy-makers and influencing policies. We have labelled this as ‘Influence’. The third and fourth factors are respectively related to gaining symbolic recognition for their organisations ‘Acknowledgement’ and fulfilling a ‘Civic Duty’.

Once clearly defined and interpretable factors were identified, the next step consisted of analysing the relationship between the composite scores for the factors on one hand, and some individual and AC-related features on the other. We have used Student’s t-test to look for significant differences in the factors scores between categories of the same variable. To represent graphically these differences, we have calculated the centroids

Table 4. Factor loadings and communalities based on principal component analysis with varimax rotation for seven reasons to participate in ACs (n = 518).

	Component				
	Knowledge	Influence	Acknowledgement	Civic Duty	Communalities
Influence		.904			.846
Contact		.721	.316		.708
Knowledge	.717	.341			.716
Insight	.895				.882
Networking	.798		.412		.818
Acknowledgement			.915		.930
Civic Duty				.921	.966

Note: Factor loadings <.3are suppressed.



(arithmetic means) of factor scores for the different profiles of ACs and its members and have plotted them in the factor space (see Figures 2 and 3 as examples).

Figures 2 and 3 include most of the individual variables used in the analysis. Age, sex and education<sup>10</sup> are traditional socio-demographic variables that may influence many social and political behaviours. In addition to these, we have added two variables that may be particularly important in defining each individual relationship to ACs. First, the role that each person plays in the AC, i.e., whom is she representing there (association, public administration, etc.). Second, the subjective level of individual involvement, to distinguish between individuals that are performing a purely organisational role and others that have a strong subjective implication to the AC.<sup>11</sup>

To proceed to the explanatory analysis, we have added two other organisational variables into the analysis. First, the type of council is one of the variables that could make a difference, especially considering the important differences between sectorial and territorially based councils. Second, among the organisational characteristics, the possibility of voting makes an important difference, to mark those ACs that perform a purely informative and ritual role where only assent is used but real decisions are never made. Using this set of independent variables<sup>12</sup>, all converted into a 0–1 range, we developed a regression analysis using, as dependent variables, the two factors that had the highest explanatory power (knowledge and influence) and were formed as a combination of several items in the previous principal component analysis.

Table 5 presents the results. For each of the factors, we present a first column only including individual variables and a second column that also incorporates the organisational variables. The results show that both individual and institutional factors have some influence in explaining the distribution of motivations. Among socio-demographic factors, older people attribute less importance to influence. This result is particularly relevant as age has the largest effect explaining influence as a reason to participate in ACs. On

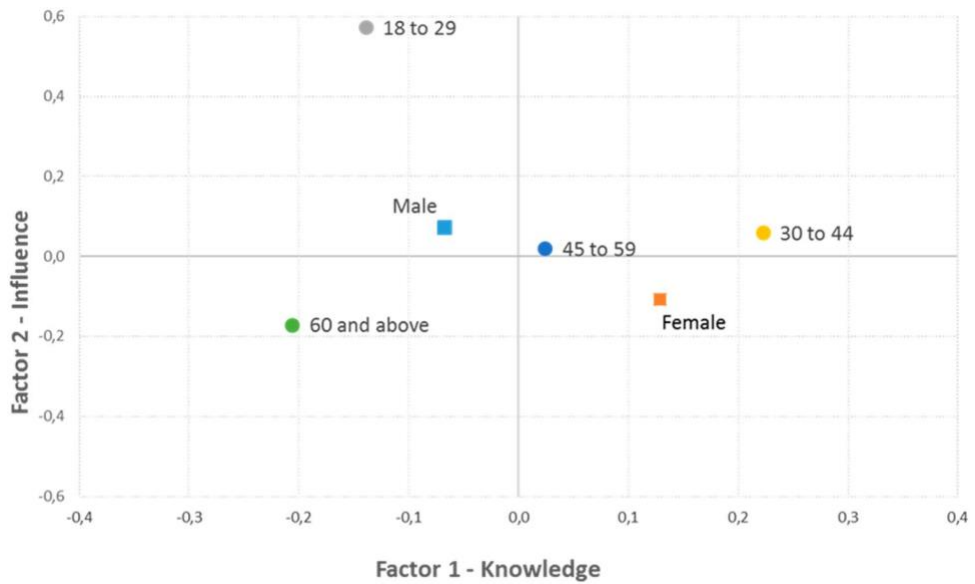


Figure 2. Differences in factor scores 1 and 2 by Sex and Age.

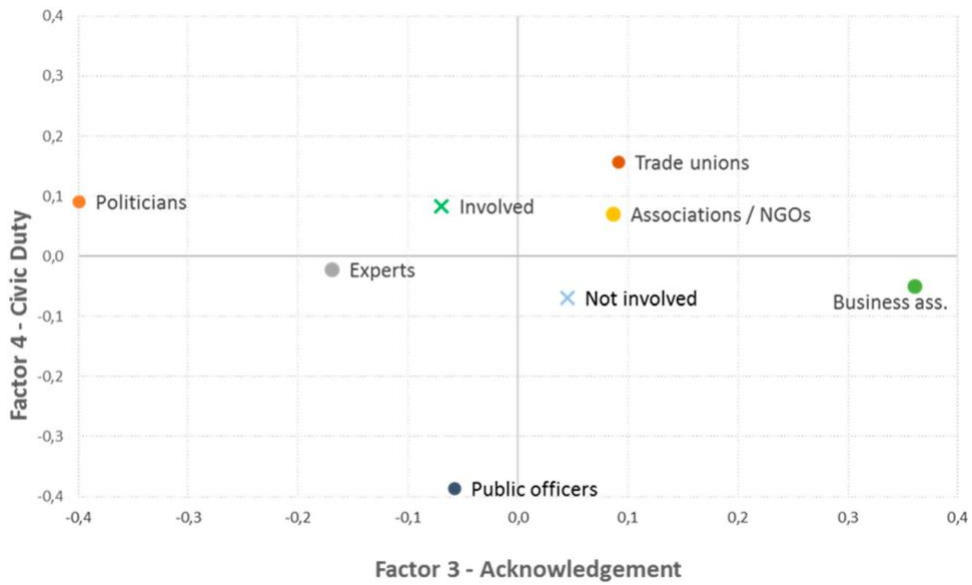


Figure 3. Differences in factor scores 3 and 4 by member profile and involvement in the advising process.

the other side, women consider knowledge-related arguments more important than men. Education (in a universe highly skewed towards high levels of education) does not reach statistical significance. Citizens more highly involved in ACs tend to consider both types of arguments as having greater importance. The second largest effect appears related to type of members: both associational members, as well as politicians, tend to place considerable emphasis on knowledge-related arguments. Regarding the institutional variables, one appears as important for each factor. Type of council is crucial for influence (the second largest coefficient for influence), where territorial councils' participants downplay

Table 5. Explanatory factors of Knowledge and Influence (OLS Regression).

	Factor Knowledge		Factor Influence	
	1	2	1	2
	B	B	B	B
(Intercept)	-0.379	-0.184	0.147	0.011
Age	-0.217	-0.078	-1.153**	-0.972**
Gender	-0.208*	-0.219*	0.161*	0.181*
Education	0.145	-0.134	0.146	0.165
Politicians	0.468*	0.420*	0.071	0.092
Public officers	0.320	0.289	-0.187	-0.250
Associations	0.489**	0.460*	0.174	0.160
Trade unions	0.211	0.294	0.167	0.100
Business organisations	0.196	0.185	0.154	0.088
Others	0.355	0.366	-0.354	-0.352
Involvement	0.320***	0.358***	0.335***	0.272**
Territorial		0.076		-0.526***
Immigration		0.089		0.013
Environment		-0.093		0.205*
Voting		-0.393**		0.108
R2	.061	.084	.068	.104

this motive. Influence appears also to be more important in environment than in education related councils. Regarding knowledge, participants in ACs where voting is present tend to place less emphasis on knowledge as a central motivation.

## Discussion

ACs are one of the most common participatory instruments used by public administrations, but they have received limited academic attention compared to other mechanisms, such as participatory budgeting or mini-publics. In this paper, we have focused on why participants attend these institutions, even if at first sight their activity appears less attractive and implies a more costly continued participation. Our results point out that the motivations to participate are diverse and include reasons which are more related to the individual participants (e.g., civic duty), but also many others related to collective rewards for their organisation. The analysis shows that motivations can be grouped into four main types: (i) contacts and knowledge; (ii) policy influence; (iii) symbolic recognition and (iv) civic duty.

This result presents interesting similarities to previous studies, reinforcing the idea that these explanations can be useful for quite different participatory settings. First, this set of motivations reinforces a long tradition of research, on both individuals (Schlozman et al., 1995) and organisations (Gamson, 1975) pointing out that several reasons beyond policy influence must be considered. For individuals, as well as for organisations, obtaining information, making contacts and building networks, or simply fulfilling their civic roles, may often be the crucial motivation. Recent studies focused on other contexts and using qualitative and ethnographic methodologies have reached similar conclusions. Zarembeg et al. (2017, pp. 185–187), have concluded that recognition (and knowledge) is crucial in Latin American ACs. This is also in line with the idea supported by Aitamurto et al. (2017) that mentions intrinsic (including civic duty) and extrinsic motivations to participate and with similar findings in several cases of participatory budgeting (Mazeaud & Talpin, 2010).

All these reasons for participating are important, but not necessarily for the same people, for the same organisations, or in the same councils. Influence is a more important motivation in sectorial ACs, and even more so in those related to the environment. The opposite happens in territorial sublocal councils, where precisely the limited scope of their decisions could facilitate, in some cases, small binding powers for councils. However, they are not perceived as important motivations by their members. This is relevant for the discussion about the traditional trade-off that appears in many democratic innovations between how important the issues being discussed are, versus the final authority of the institution (Sintomer & De Maillard, 2007). Our results could suggest that having a small voice in an institution where important decisions are being made (like the National School Council) could be perceived as more relevant, than having decisive powers over the name of a district

street (as an example of small decisions being made in territorial councils), but further analysis is needed to confirm this idea.

One organisational characteristic of the councils has appeared as important in explaining the interest in knowledge: the existence of voting provisions. This seems to suggest another important trade-off between the two central motivations: influence and knowledge. Voting may be necessary to make decisions and have influence. On the other hand, when voting gets into the room, sides are created and enemies appear, making

the consensual and networking logic more difficult. In fact, it may be that the networking and information role of many ACs becomes their crucial attraction (Serdült & Welp, 2015): in an increasingly complex participatory system, citizens (and especially associative actors) have different motivations to attend a council, a participatory budget or to respond to an on-line consultation. They prioritise, for example, contact with politicians or learning about more specialised issues in some ACs.

The role played by influence and by achieving knowledge and contacts is diverse for different publics. Why influence is more important for men or for young people is a result that deserves further attention and that may require future research to incorporate personality variables into the analysis (Jennstal, 2018). On the other hand, the two categories which are more associated with knowledge present a sharp contrast. For politicians, the council does not present an opportunity to gain policy influence, but to get information about the needs and preferences of potentially important social allies (Navarro, 2004). It is most likely that something different is occurring in the other category, associations. For some associations (e.g., immigrants and minorities), getting in contact with other similar associations and the possibility of creating networks may be a highly central motivation for participating in these spaces. In sum, some of the most resourceful actors (politicians) and some of the least resourceful can perceive more benefits from getting in touch with others than with formal influence in policy-making. The variables that have appeared as non-significant in our analyses also deserve some reflection. This is especially the case with all those related to social inequalities (contextual variables such as local GDP per capita, unemployment rates, but also individual education). However, the profiles of the survey respondents suggest an explanation for this result: our universe of analysis is not extremely diverse (i.e., it is mostly made up of middle aged, highly educated people) and inequalities have played a role prior to the incorporation into the ACs, where many disadvantaged groups are quite poorly represented. Research into participatory institutions provides two contrasting approaches regarding the relationship between them and social exclusion. According to some of them (Dacombe, 2017; Fung, 2004) in spite of clear difficulties, participation is still possible amidst strong inequalities. Others, in contrast, tend to view the enhanced inequalities that these institutions could contribute to creating (Fiorina, 1999), or at least the common strong social bias of participants that their institutional design entails (Lee, Mcquarrie, & Walker, 2015; Navarro & Font, 2010). The case of Spanish ACs provides a scenario which is closer to the second, with

participation rules that facilitate access mostly to the associational leadership and with a form of participation that requires continued involvement and frequent difficult policy debates that may not be the most attractive scenarios for some participants. The fact that only a participatory elite can access these institutions is probably more related to their specific design than to a general neoliberal scenario (Lee et al., 2015), but only further research across different political contexts and participatory institutions can seriously answer this question.

These two findings (policy influence being only one among several motivations, and a clearly biased social profile of participants) mean bad news for those who expected participation to be a strategy for fighting social inequalities (Smith, 2009). There is a lack of the excluded among participants and, as many are interested in things other than policy influence, it may be not very realistic to expect that participation (or at least, this form of participation) can pave the way towards less unequal societies. This does not necessarily mean that ACs are democratically useless. They are most likely a realistic strategy to achieving one of the central goals of associative democracy: a democratic and policy-making process that allows a richer variety of voices to be heard (Hirst, 1994) and through which civil society may become more organised, informed and connected. Although research specifically designed to address these issues is needed in order to confirm these potentials. Two other topics deserve further attention through additional research. We focused our explanatory analysis on the two dimensions for which we had richer (and therefore more reliable) information, policy influence and knowledge. However, the other two explanations of participation do also contribute significantly to understanding the full set of participatory motivations. Research including richer measurements of them (acknowledgement and civic duty) and exploring them in other participatory settings should contribute to their interpretation. Also, the motivations analysed here represent an interesting mixture of individual and collective motivations, and our materials do not allow us to sufficiently disentangle the role that each of these parts contributes. Whereas in policy terms the distinction may not be so important, in terms of knowledge (or civic duty) it would be crucial to know how much the individual and how much the group interests or values matter in the decision to participate.

In sum, in spite of (or precisely, because of) being the 'ugly ducklings' of participatory governance, research into ACs could teach us relevant lessons about how and why participatory institutions exist and are able to keep up sustained participation, even when they may not deliver much in terms of policy influence.

1. We do not distinguish between socio-tropic or ego-tropic policy influence for two reasons. First, this distinction may often not be clear in reality. Second, even if it was, our data does not allow this distinction to be made.
2. Several indicators in our dataset point out in this direction. In councils where the members have an assenting role (11.4% of councils), interviewees are significantly more dissatisfied with the substantive scope of the debates (8.9% versus 2.4% strongly dissatisfied) and the extent to which their contributions are taken into account (11.1% versus 3.2%). On the other hand, members in councils with voting provisions perceive a significantly higher pro portion of cases where the content of the policy changes as a result of the advice provided by the AC (39.7% versus 21.7% say sometimes the policy changes).
3. As is usually the case, these average figures hide quite a large diversity: the 17 regions range from having 18 in one of them to a maximum of 137. A similar pattern is found in cities, where Barcelona reaches a maximum of 152, whereas many of them have 12–13.
4. The questionnaire for this survey is based on Fobé et al. (2013). We thank Ellen Fobé for her cooperation.
5. Romão et al. (2017) follow a similar delimitation strategy in Brazil. They compare health councils and women councils. The first as an example of full sectorial institutionalization with an homogeneous policy community, and the second as an example of limited institutionalization in a transversal policy area (2017: 41).
6. This figure includes some cases where the team directly searched on the internet for the list of members and their contact information after several unsuccessful reminders to the ACs administration.
7. We have also conducted case studies in 10 ACs using document search and interviews (63 in total, from 3 to 8 in each case) to diverse participants and organizers. These interviews are not systematically used in this paper.
8. The rotation method was Varimax with Kaiser normalization.
9. We have used Polychoric correlations to optimize PCA outcomes, as research shows that Pearson Correlations can substantially underestimate the strength of the relationship between ordinal variables (Baglin, 2014).
10. Education is also our best proxy for social class, since the survey does not include other individual data on this topic.
11. Dichotomization of a 7-point Likert scale from Strongly agree to Strongly disagree with the sentence 'I feel strongly involved with the whole process of advising' where 'agree' + 'strongly agree' are recoded as 'Involved' and the rest of cases as 'Not involved'.
12. During the analysis we tried to incorporate other additional variables, mostly contextual characteristics of the ACs (e.g., whether the AC had policy oriented working groups) or of the areas where they existed (e.g., local GDP per capita, unemployment rates), but none of them reached significant results. Table A5 shows the basic characteristics of all the independent variables included in the final analysis.

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## Appendix

Table A1. Spanish ACs by level of administration and policy field.

Subject	Municipalities	Regions	State	General total
Social Welfare	17	47	2	66
Education	37	79	7	123
Healthcare	19	92	8	119
Foreign Affairs	20	30	4	54
Culture/Heritage/Language/Religion	24	55	5	84
Sports/Leisure	8	43	8	59
Economy	24	330	45	399
Primary Sector	1	122	7	130
Industry/Commerce/Business	15	71	20	106
Employment/Labour relations/safety at work		72	5	77
Tourism	2	16	1	19
Prices/taxes/games and bets	2	29	6	37
Consumption and others	4	18	5	27
Public Administration	4	72	7	83
Environment	24	255	6	285
Citizen Participation/Volunteering/Third Sector	21	24	2	47
Transports/Mobility	8	35	3	46
Security	5	28	4	37
ICTs/Science		14	7	21
Urban Planning	7	12		19
Housing	1	13	1	15
Immigration and Ethnic and Cultural Diversity	11	18	4	33
Childhood – Youth – Elders – Family	49	54	5	108
Childhood	10	13	1	24
Youth	19	19	1	39
Elders	19	11	1	31
Family	1	11	2	14
Women	30	25	3	58
LGTB	4	3		7
Dependents/Disabled People/Accessibility	12	30	2	44
Territorial	303			303
Territorial General (Social City Councils)	25			25
Territorial Districts	203			203
Territorial Neighbourhoods	75			75
Others	1	2		3
General Total	629	1261	123	2013

Table A2. Sample composition and reasons for exclusion.

	n	%
Total sampled cases	101	100
Cases excluded from final sample	31	30.7
– Inactive councils	15	14.8
– Explicit refusals	4	4.0
– Implicit refusals	12	11.9
Cases in final sample		
Advisory councils	70	69.3
Members	569	100

Table A3. Satisfaction survey response rates.

	AC participating in the survey	Members in participating ACs	Valid interviews	RR at AC level	RR at Member level
Total	70	2998	569	81.4	19.0
Contact mediated by AC coordinator	43	1903	237	82.7	12.5
Direct contact with members	27	1095	332	90.0	30.3
School councils	23	1133	266	79.3	23.5
Environment councils	20	514	94	87.0	18.3
Immigration councils	12	754	141	92.3	18.7
Territorial councils	15	597	68	71.4	11.4
State councils	5	277	46	83.3	16.6
Regional councils	35	1467	309	97.2	21.1
Municipal councils	30	1254	214	68.2	17.1

Table A4. Bias assessment by members' profile.

	Presence in the survey	Presence according to AC rules	Difference
Politicians	13.5	11.8	1.7
Public officers	15.3	19.3	-4.0
Total Administration	28.8	31.1	-2.3
Experts, academics or people of recognised standing	7.9	8.7	-0.8
Citizens not representing an association	1.9	1.7	0.2
Associations/NGOs/Federations of associations	36.6	27.7	8.9
Trade unions	14.4	14.5	-0.1
Business organisations	9.3	7.1	2.2
Representatives from other councils	0.7	5.7	-5.0
Others	0.4	3.5	-3.1

Table A5. Descriptive statistics of the variables used in the regression analysis.

	Mean (%)	SD	Min.	Max.	
Profile	Age	.52	.490	0	1
	Gender (1 = Male)	.60	.341	0	1
	Education (1 = University; 0 = lower)	.86	.342	0	1
	Politicians = 1 (rest = 0)	.14	.360	0	1
	Public officers = 1 (rest = 0)	.15	.482	0	1
	Associations = 1 (rest = 0)	.37	.351	0	1
	Trade unions = 1 (rest = 0)	.14	.290	0	1
	Business organisations = 1 (rest = 0)	.09	.170	0	1
	Others = 1 (rest = 0)	.03	.497	0	1
	Reference category: Experts	.08	.270	0	1
Subject	Involvement (rest = 0)	.44	.497	0	1
	School = 1 (rest = 0)	.47	.499	0	1
	Immigration = 1 (rest = 0)	.16	.371	0	1
	Environment = 1 (rest = 0)	.25	.432	0	1
	Reference category: Education	.11	.325	0	1
Voting (Continuous 0-1)	.67	.367	0	1	