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The Jewel in the Crown: Co-optive capacity and participation during austerity in Cardiff and San Sebastian-Donostia

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By comparing the cities of Cardiff and San Sebastián-Donostia (Donostia), we argue that local governments' capacity to co-opt provides a valid framework to understand changes in citizen participation under fiscal austerity. The argument is based on the close interrelationships among co-optation, legitimacy and procedural regulation (Selznick, 1949). These concepts help to understand how citizen participation is maintained in periods of instability, experienced by city governments during and in the aftermath of extra-local financial crisis. We argue that local government's legitimacy is maintained insofar as it shows capacity to co-opt, defined as practices and processes of negotiation, capture, 'technicalization' and minimization of conflict. These elements work in tandem with those factors that have been identified in cities experiencing austerity under a longer-term neoliberalizing discourse (Peck, 2012). The interwoven framework between capacity to co-opt and 'austerity urbanism' is used to understand not only variation across the two cities in their administrative processes, but also to unpick the contradictions that emerge in practice during the liminal time between fiscal crisis and normality (Bayirbag et al., 2017).

The comparison is interesting as both cities symbolize the pride ('the jewel of the crown') necessary to sustain the national identities of Wales and the Basque Country. In selecting these two cities, we contrast how their power struggle to maintain co-optive and regulatory powers is shaped by their constitutional interdependence with national and subnational tiers of government - which have protected them against or delayed the effects of the 2008 financial crisis. Furthermore, both cities' reliance on the tourism industry (sport, culture or gastronomy) and their lack of mass protest, albeit for different historical reasons, contribute to frame the debate on how participation unfolds in periods of fiscal austerity.

The paper is structured as follows. It first presents a framework of co-optive capacity, which is then juxtaposed with the factors comprising Peck's austerity urbanism under neoliberalism. This is followed by a brief contextualization of each city's fiscal structuring, political ideology and participatory structures, providing a foundation for the subsequent findings which contrast the two cities and discuss how 'austerity co-optive' factors develop in practice. Finally, the implications of the findings are considered, including reflections on the significance of the juxtaposed framework of co-optive capacity under austerity.

Co-optation, legitimacy and regulation

Recent studies of austerity and crisis have focused on the variegated effects of urban austerity (Bayirbag et al., 2017; Peck et al., 2013). The procedural administrative mechanisms used by local government to cope with this type of phenomenon have received less emphasis. In addressing this gap, we use the term austerity to refer to the fiscal austerity that many local authorities in Spain and the United Kingdom have experienced as a result of the 2008 financial crisis. Fiscal austerity tends to be studied in terms of two types of change: the declining financial resources of local authorities which directly affect service provision; and changes in the discourse (policy and practice) of austerity, materialized in policy documentation and administrative arrangements that regulate the extent to which responsibilities are downloaded and offloaded.

We focus on co-optation, procedural regulation and legitimacy as mechanisms to establish social order (rules) by local governments through their governing processes of service provision in periods of fiscal austerity. We treat the three terms as complementary insofar as governments are compelled to show they have capacity to govern not only to respond to people's needs, but also for residents or constituents to recognize or legitimize governments' role and authority (Selznick, 1949). Selznick defines formal co-optation as 'the process of [publicly] absorbing new elements into the leadership of a policy-determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence' (1949:13). Hence, cooptation 'fulfils both the political function of defending legitimacy and the administrative function of establishing channels of communication and direction' (1949:14).

Selznick's definition is appropriate for our analysis as it centres on daily bureaucratic processes (i.e. selecting citizen collaborators, implementing project objectives) related to the democratic ideal of local participation. The administrative function of co-optation is highly interlinked with a local authority's capacity to govern, which we understand as the ability and resources to formulate, monitor and enforce rules that regulate processes of service provision (Levi-Faud, 2014; Menahem and Stein, 2013). Meanwhile, regulation is understood as a set of local procedural norms, practices and organizational arrangements that are the outcome of coordinated social and political relations in capitalist economies (Painter, 1998).

Following Selznick's argument, the links between capacity to govern and co-optation become evident when government invites the participation of organized civil society and organic community groups into (a) the provision of services and (b) the formulation and monitoring of rules of service provision. We argue that in periods of fiscal crisis, the capacity to govern can be interpreted as a capacity to co-opt insofar as government actors perceive that their legitimacy is called into question as a result of diminishing financial resources to govern. Their legitimacy may also be questioned in relation to the increased role of civil society groups, invited to participate in service provision before or during the crisis.

To understand capacity to co-opt it is important to unpack Selznick's definition of cooptation. For this purpose, we deploy four elements drawn from debates in public administration which are significant to understand participation under urban austerity. The first is the assumption that co-optation implies some degree of negotiation between a powerful and a less powerful party. Hence co-optation implies an unequal relationship portrayed as domination through justificatory means (legitimacy). In particular, we are interested in relationships between government officers and citizens found in debates regarding clientelism and patronage (Auyero, 2011; Selznick, 1949). The second is capture of non-governmental actors and their resources into state-sponsored initiatives. Such capture may involve either corrupt practices such as offering public monies in exchange for political support and tactics that limit input of rival parties (Attuyer, 2015), or 'law-abiding' practices that gradually convince the less powerful party to adopt the beliefs and practices of the powerful. All types of capture contribute to maintaining or building government's legitimacy.

The third element is 'technicalization' (Kothari, 2005) of service-delivery processes that involve the participation of citizens or civil society in contexts where discourses of democratic participation and neoliberalization co-exist (Clarke and Newman, 1997). Technicalization pinpoints practices related to the 'monopolization of expertise and authority by professionalizing interventions of state actors', which, at least initially, tend to be alien and incomprehensible to non-state actors or citizens, thus limiting their ability to develop critical, challenging or emancipatory approaches (Kothari, 2005). Finally, co-optation aims to minimize or buffer conflict during processes of service provision, albeit never eradicating it completely (Spicer, 2010). The minimization of conflict is not necessarily

negative (i.e. limiting emancipation, depoliticizing a process). The buffering of conflict may be positive, such as to avoid violence, promote respect of (regulatory) processes 'despite detestation of their outcome' (i.e. electoral results) or to sacrifice everyday commitments 'for the long term preservation of allies' (Hampshire, 1999:49-50 & 73). These four elements feed into our framework to understand variation in capacity to co-opt.

Neoliberal austerity and co-optive capacity

Neoliberal reforms - 'deregulation' of the economy, decentralization and offloading of responsibilities, and internationalization - have restructured the state's role from provider to facilitator, associated with roll-back and roll-out strategies adopted by the state (Jessop, 2002; Peck and Tickell, 2002); and from facilitator to disciplinarian (Wacquant, 2010). It has been widely acknowledged that there has not been a withdrawal but a restructuring of the state's role, which has inevitably resulted in degrees of conflict or resistance by incumbent elites (Robinson, 2004; Harrison, 2010), tiers of government (Newman, 2014), and marginalized groups (della Porta and Mattoni, 2014).

Conflict and resistance against neoliberalism have been present over the last 40 years, albeit in some cases not manifested as protest or riot (Morton, 2003; Tonkiss, 2013), nor seeking transformation (Dikeç and Swyngedouw, 2017). It is in such cases that local governments are more successful in implementing co-optive mechanisms to capture dissidents and gradually convince them to adopt processes of governance that have commonly accompanied neoliberal governing regimes, characterized by waves of roll-back and roll-out strategies (Brenner et al., 2010; Davies, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2005). In epochs of financial crisis, conflict and resistance have taken the form of protests and riots by the marginalized in important urban centres. But in secondary European cities where mass protest has not occured, such as Cardiff and Donostia, the conflict has been encapsulated in governing decisions by incumbent government elites that invite participation and volunteering. Co-optation is based on our assumption that as crises (financial included) bring uncertainty (Bayirbag, et al., 2017; Peck et al., 2013), the governance mechanisms that local governments use to establish participation destabilize, such as procedural-administrative regulations that contribute to building local government's legitimacy on a daily basis.

Our approach contributes to broader discussions about urban austerity. We find that it speaks to the 'boundaries' and 'politics' elements of framing urban crisis suggested by Bayirbag et al. (2017). These authors argue that crisis needs to be 'differentiated from its antonyms, normality or equilibrium', by paying careful attention to the liminal time between crisis and normality (2017:8). By focusing on these two cities, the cooptive capacity framework provides a way of understanding how such 'liminality' fares across space and time. Focusing on liminality helps to unpick the embeddedness of neoliberalism in the fabric of everyday policy-making, which we argue is important to understand neoliberalism's durability and recurrent contradictions (Cahill and Konings, 2017; Tonkiss, 2013).

The 2008 financial crisis in the western hemisphere has posed challenges to the neoliberal state and consequently brought the strategies and mechanisms through which regulation can function into question. Peck (2012) posits that these challenges would be felt primarily by subnational levels of government, particularly those located in urban settings which have concentrated partnerships and contracted-out forms of organization in service provision. He argues that one of the effects of fiscal austerity on neoliberal strategies and projects has been the deepening of decentralization through devolved fiscal policies or 'soft budgetary measures'. These distribute financial risk in the delivery of services from national to regional and local levels (downloading) and from the local level of government to community/ third sector organizations (TSOs) and private sector contractors

(offloading). For Peck, austerity urbanism is about 'making others pay the price of fiscal retrenchment' (2012: 632) at any scale of action. The ways that 'others' (non-state actors) 'pay the price' is context-contingent.

Four of the seven factors which comprise Peck's austerity urbanism (2012) are valid here given their relationship with co-optive capacity: rollback redux, risk-shifting rationalities, austerity governance and placebo dependency. They are valid as they are more strategic than the other three (downsizing and leaner local states, fire-scale privatizations and financial tournaments), which are more tactical.

Peck's analysis is useful as it provides a comprehensive framework that acknowledges the different dimensions of the state's reconfiguration. However, it overlooks the detailed minutiae of everyday policy that helps to identify the contradictions in which the austerity discourse is immersed and the way it is grounded in different contexts. Given our focus on co-optation under austerity, we develop a framework that juxtaposes Peck's four factors with the four co-optive elements discussed in the previous section (Table 1).

Rollback neoliberalism has been explained by Peck and colleagues (Brenner et al., 2010) as the rollback of the state in providing specific goods and services. It was followed by a rollout wave of state restructuring since the 1980s which paved the way for the downloading and offloading of state responsibilities to third sector and community organizations, encapsulated in the proliferation of public-private and community-public partnerships across different cities in the western hemisphere. The rollback redux, derived from the 2008 crisis, aims to roll back the strategies rolled out a generation ago. For example, the state has withdrawn grants formerly made to community groups to build community-public partnerships but seeks to maintain collaborative links with the community to carry on delivering local services. Links are clear with the capacity to co-opt. For example, it can be argued that the rollout process worked as a way of capturing dissident citizens, while beginning to prepare them for the technical and expert knowledge required for inter-sectoral collaboration to occur (Barnes et al., 2007; Kothari, 2005). In preparing for the rollback redux, interdependency and organizational mimicry (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) between state actors and citizens also developed. Thus any conflict associated with this process tends to be concentrated at the implementation stage (Spicer, 2010).

Peck identifies austerity governance when forms of management by audit and rule by accountancy are consolidated, an interpretation discussed in detail by scholars of public administration and development studies. Such managerial practices are associated with professionalizing and technicalizing interventions of both state and non-state actors (Clarke and Newman, 1997; Kothari, 2005), through for example 'data generation for new forms of state management, new ways of managing expenditure, [or] meetings to discuss outputs and inputs into administrative systems' (Harrison, 2010:108). These practices are also associated with 'new public management' which with economic globalization has reached countries beyond the global north (Jreisat, 2001). It is the technicalization of everyday practice, through the rule-making and rule-monitoring required to manage and coordinate the delivery of collaborative services, which highlights the links to co-optive capacity.

In the global north, the responsibility to couple managerial processes with budgetary constraints has been downloaded to subnational levels of government. Peck terms this risk-shifting rationalities, where city governance management processes promote deployment of downloading and offloading tactics. Thus professionalizing and technicalizing interventions are not only passed down from national to subnational levels of government, but also from state to non-state actors. Expenditure management and monitoring of processes to achieve outputs and outcomes starts being conducted

by TSOs, which play an intermediary role between the state and community actors (Bovaird, 2014; Chaskin and Greenberg, 2015). While aiming to pass responsibility to third sector and community organizations, Peck argues that it is likely that the poorest of the population will be impacted the most as they tend to have fewer skills and resources to take on the state's managerial responsibilities. In response, governments have identified the need to recruit officers whose skills span organizational or sectorial boundaries to bridge the requirements of government with the interests or needs of non-state partners (authors; Skelcher et al., 2013). In particular, these officers seek to promulgate community self-management, albeit subject to the procedural regulations stablished by the (local) state as a way to ensure co-optation. However, this process allows room for negotiation and consequently tensions may traduce into conflict as nonstate actors pursue tactics and mechanisms of self-management that question those sponsored by the state (Elwood, 2006).

Peck argues that placebo dependency arises when local government shows an increasing mismatch between its capacity to act locally to achieve economic growth and social development and the imperative 'to be seen to be acting' locally (2012: 648). This term is useful because to continue co-opting, government wants to be seen, despite the challenges brought by fiscal austerity, to be doing something. In periods of uncertainty this is often as important as getting a result. However, the nature of the mismatch between capacity and imperative to-be-seen-to-be-acting locally will depend on the approaches to fiscal austerity that different cities experience and adopt. Barbehön and Münch (2015: 13) argue that 'although global financial and economic crisis is translated into local funding crisis this is done very specifically and in accordance with locally specific wider narratives' shaped by discourse and stakeholders' daily interpretations. For these authors, austerity discourses can create narratives of reinvention, exploit previously existing narratives or react with narratives that blame or protect the city from external threats caused by the dominance of financial capitalism. We argue that these narratives can be combined, especially over time. Local governments at first may show resignation to fiscal austerity. Over time as they comply because of a lack of a perceived viable alternative – coined 'austerity realism' (Davies and Thompson, 2016) - they reinvent or build upon existing narratives that develop through administrative processes and which help to maintain their legitimacy. When this assemblage of narratives is applied to participation it is possible to encounter tactics that provide opportunities to empower TSOs or community groups, while changes to procedural regulation deepen downloading and offloading mechanisms that may contribute to co-optive capacity.

Comparing Cardiff and San Sebastián-Donostia

The rationale deployed to develop the comparison draws from 'comparativism' (Robinson, 2011), an approach which moves away from traditional patterns centred on similarity and standardization. Instead, it focuses on differences, albeit centred on a similar problematic. Two simultaneous but unrelated aspects led us to compare Cardiff and Donostia. The first was both cities' protection from or delayed effects of the 2008 financial crisis upon their budgets; the second was the lack of mass protest in the two cities, in contrast to those which occurred in large cities such as London or Madrid against some of the effects of fiscal austerity upon the population (i.e. withdrawal of social and housing services).

Cardiff is the nation's capital and largest city of Wales (population 346,000, 2011 Census). It seats the national (regional) government, Welsh Government; hence the city is well known for its service economy centred on public sector activities and services such as insurance, real estate, sport and cultural tourism and gastronomy.

Donostia is capital city of Gipuzkoa Province, located just over 100km east of Bilbao. It has historically been recognized as a locus for luxury tourism, cultural activities (in 2011 it was awarded the 2016 European Capital of Culture) and high-end gastronomy. It has 186,126 inhabitants and the metropolitan area has 436,000 (2016 Census).

To situate the problematic that encompassed both cities in line with the comparativism approach requires a contextual review to help identify difference in processes and practice. Four aspects are relevant to our argument: the fiscal structure of the city and region; the political ideology of the governing elites; their duration in holding office; and the institutionalization of citizen participation within the cities' governance. The latter is important after cycles of mining and separatist protests waned in Wales (1980s) and the Basque Country (1990s), respectively. Analyses of the 2008 financial crisis highlight the Basque Country and Navarra as the autonomous regions that encountered the least negative economic impact across Spain. This is a result of the regions' economic diversity, including stable export markets and a low dependency on the construction sector (Méndez et al., 2015). According to the National and Basque Institutes of Statistics, by 2012-13 Donostia showed higher levels of GDP per capita and household income and the lowest rates of unemployment than the rest of the Basque Country and Spain.

Concomitantly, these two regions have a relatively high level of fiscal autonomy compared to other autonomous communities in Spain. This enables a revenue system (50-60 per cent above average) to respond to agreed and convened decisions taken by their national assemblies and provincial councils, which have favoured welfare policies in the last two decades (Cordero Ferrera and Murillo Huertas, 2008:14). An exception, however, is observed in the diminishing expenditure on public infrastructure which affected the Basque and local tiers of government. The unique circumstances in welfare have protected several Basque cities from the negative impacts that the crisis generated for social and housing services. Hence, during fieldwork Donostia did not face reduced expenditure in social services, though it did undergo cuts to other services such as street maintenance. Moreover, the broader discourse of austerity that Spain experienced impacted the politics and management of the city's participatory system, especially in urban planning.

In contrast, Wales lacks independent tax raising powers from Whitehall, London. Its fiscal dependency led its public services to enjoy initially a relative protection from austerity derived from the 2008 financial crisis; partly due to the time lag in English cuts feeding through the formula used to set Wales' funding. These cuts cascaded to Welsh Government in its 2014/15 budget. Financial allocations to local authorities were considered 'by far the worst settlement since devolution' with severe budget cuts of over 5% in real terms for 2014/15, rising to 9% by 2015/16 (authors). Budget cuts of some £100 million were sought in the following three years by Cardiff Council. Welsh Government ministers and local politicians blamed the UK government for these cuts. As a result, Cardiff Council has looked to rationalize and reorganize public services, taking advantage of its city-wide governance model and the Cardiff Debate, a citizen consultation exercise, which helped the council to prioritize service provision, especially of community and social services, in the 2014/ 15 budget. 'Rejecting austerity altogether was not an option and therefore the future structuring and operation of the council's policy-making had implications for participatory governance' through co-production with and commissioning of services from civil society organizations and community groups (authors).

Between 1991 and 2015, Donostia was ruled either by party coalitions or minority governments led by the two main Left political parties: the non-nationalist Basque Socialist Party (PSE-EE) and the more radical nationalist Euskal Herria Bildu Party (Bildu). Despite the differences between parties, the overall political ideology of the city has shared a relatively critical posture against neoliberal

policies impacting the local welfare state, while promoting citizen participation. However, the lack of absolute majorities in government necessitated the Left's engagement in continuous negotiation with other Right-centred political parties (authors, 2016). Cardiff since 1995, has been mainly dominated by the Left through the Labour Party, over time the local council's power has shifted from a strong majority to a simple majority (just over 50% in 2016). During our study, the Labour party showed internal divisions between two historical factions: one against budget cuts to social services related to leisure, sport and libraries; and the other in favour of these cuts. However, since the 1990s both factions have been supportive of the neoliberal boosterist vision pursued in developing and regenerating the city through private housing and infrastructural investment (Morgan, 2006; Cardiff Council, 2007).

Citizen participation has been emblematic of Left parties in the Basque Country and replaced long cycles of separatist protest supporting Euskadi Ta Askatasuna. The structure of citizen participation flourished in Donostia when PSE-EE took office in 1991. Bildu was in power during the period of study and its administration (2011-2015) was characterized by the introduction of more radical participatory plans and programmes than the PSE-EE, in response to the formal institutionalization of the local 2007 participatory regulation and law. The Bildu government aimed to create a systemic participatory structure to overcome fragmentation through city-wide participatory budgeting and a strategy that supplemented the accountability of representative government with state-sponsored innovations of participation. This strategy sought to enhance the social capital of civil society and encourage a participatory culture where citizens were not only consulted about city development plans, but also could make decisions within the policy making process. Examples included: Auzolan, a neighbourhood regeneration communitarian project; Villa Alegría-Txantxarreka, a community centre run by the youth assembly and other grassroots groups; and Casa de las Mujeres, a programme run in a council building by the city's feminist movement. However, projects co-produced by local government and citizens and civil society associations were found to be closely aligned to the management objectives followed by the local council. By the end of the Bildu administration, a city-wide participatory strategy had proved difficult to implement, in part due to historical differences between the central and peripheral areas of the metropolitan zone.

In contrast, citizen participation in Cardiff has not been emblematic of the Labour Party, instead collaboration and partnership have been the preferred terms in local discourse. Since 2000, citizen participation in the city has been coupled with partnership working through the national poverty reduction programme, Communities First (CF). Cardiff holds a handful of highly deprived areas that have been part of the CF. CF partnerships were developed involving grassroots groups and activists who depended on resources from the Welsh Government and local council to develop a range of projects to improve education and health across the vulnerable population.

The result after 10 years of sponsorship has been empowerment of several civil society groups that have learned to work and co-produce with the (local) state. Over the past few years, partnership working has culminated in a collaborative model, Cardiff Partnership, which through a multi-agency body composed of governmental and umbrella civil society organizations has aimed to identify and tackle policy challenges related to housing, social care and anti-social behavior. The model also manages the provision of local services city-wide. Although citizen participation is not a key element of the model, the council has considered it inclusive of citizens as civil society organizations and CF partnerships have become central in delivering neighbourhood services, especially since the financial crisis. The local council has also promoted other participatory initiatives such as citizen panels, meetings and consultations, but these have been carried out in a fragmented way responding to specific policy needs regarding planning, policing, and neighbourhood renewal.

Fieldwork in the two cities was conducted through semi-structured interviews (24 in Donostia and 29 in Cardiff) between summer 2013 and spring 2016. Through a snowballing technique, we interviewed social activists and TSO officers, state officers involved in citizen participation and social service provision, and local politicians. The first stage of data collection comprised an exploratory approach to understanding citizen participation; this was followed by further interviews with local actors who played an important role in the citizen participation process of each city; and the final stage followed up specific processes relevant to each city, wherein some participants were interviewed for a second time. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The transcribed data were coded deploying terms selected to unpick the daily practices of capture, technicalization, negotiation and buffering conflict, as contained in the framework of co-optive capacity. These terms were: rule making, rule monitoring, risk management, selection of collaborators, determination of goals, resource management, and procedural learning. The analysis in the next section is based upon a systematic coding of these terms across all 53 interviews conducted in both cities. The interview quotes in the next section were deliberately selected to emphasize the particularities we wanted to underline in our argument.

Discussion of findings

Because of the period in which data were collected, an analysis of the initial, liminal responses (i.e. the transition from fiscal pre-austerity to post-austerity) of both city governments and their impact upon citizen participation is discussed. The analysis is structured by the austerity co-optive factors presented above. Each of the four, paired factors is not evenly manifested between the two cities. This is to be expected because the comparative rationale departs from a similar problematic and focuses instead on specific contextual factors.

Preparing for rollback redux or flexing the muscles of 'capture'

Like the rest of the UK, the pre-austerity period in Cardiff was characterized by partnership working between the state and local communities/TSOs. It was a period during which models of roll-over funding by the state (national and local) to community groups and TSOs were very common. This created TSO financial dependency upon the state, while the inculcation of civil society co-responsibility was being developed. It was a process of 'making people more responsible'. A similar experience is observed in Donostia, where partnership working between the public and third sectors before 2010 was highly promoted. This characteristic has not been unique to Donostia, but to the whole Gipuzkoa Province (Arrieta Frutos and Etxezarreta Etxarri, 2012).

By the time budget cuts reached Cardiff, the responsibilization of civil society had not reached the levels of autonomy desired. As one local council officer put it: 'We're not as good at engaging with the communities as we could be. I still think that we've got the legacy of doing to people rather than doing with people'. But in addressing budget cuts, this officer concluded 'I think things are definitely changing [becoming less dependent]' (GO/C_1).

Therefore, the start of the austerity period was characterized by a transition in the allocation of funds; from a grant recipient model of funding that rolled over funding from state to civil society agencies to a very prescriptive service delivery model, where TSOs or equivalent were essentially tied to the processes that the local council wanted these agencies to pursue. As Cardiff Council envisaged its budget cuts, it began thinking of new ways to tighten control of TSOs through the Cardiff Partnership. Social activists were critical of this model, one stated:

Increasingly I think the [Welsh] State is most comfortable relating to organizations that mirror itself and many of the big NGOs have essentially adopted a statist bureaucratic set-up even though they're

doing voluntary sector work. They set themselves up with a Chief Executive and a hierarchy and so on and everything is done by staff rather than people on the ground. People are reduced to the role of volunteers. But the Council is much more comfortable largely often because they're often funding them or have until now funded those things. (SA/C_1)

Such 'mirroring' was acknowledged by council officers and a wide range of TSO officers, who had worked in the city for a decade or more, some of them former members of grassroots groups. A similar experience was observed in Donostia; this is boldly put by a municipal councillor who was critical about the fusion between the two sectors:

the third sector has been captured [by the administration] and public administration has also been captured by the third sector, because it is easier to delegate responsibility to the third sector as opposed to assuming it. (P/D_1)

In Donostia the austerity narrative impacted the municipal government's practice through a re-centralization of social assistance. For example, municipal government ceased sponsoring soup kitchens managed previously by faith groups and instead subsidized individuals directly to help them buy food. It also halted a concession of a youth community centre formerly ran by civil society associations. Re-centralization was driven partly by government officers' interpretation of the rights discourse, who believed that the 'Council has to guarantee social rights' of its residents. We observed that in the social services arena, Donostia Council was trying to find a balance between the pre-austerity partnership arrangements established with TSOs, while not letting any opportunity pass to recapture responsibility.

In both cities, preparing for the rollback redux also implied new organizational arrangements in the running of community centres. Although the foundation of community hubs predated the impact of the budget cuts in Cardiff, it presaged these by helping to legitimize downloading and offloading tactics by making collaboration and co-production visible to the public eye. This was the case of the Ely and Caerau Community Hub which housed public sector providers, TSOs and community groups together in a single building. Multi-agency teams from all these sectors were collaborating in the provision of community services. In Donostia the Casa de las Mujeres provided a similar example; the management of administrative practices to promote women's rights in the city was co-developed between community groups and municipal government, but the building was owned by the latter.

Technicalization and professionalism as a means to ensure co-optive capacity

The preparation for rollback redux developed in both cities during the pre-austerity years, from neighbourhood mobilizations and protest to their formalization into neighbourhood associations or TSOs. Their formalization required daily rule-making and rule-monitoring. Through following specific processes in their organization (i.e. reporting, establishing objectives and welcoming state funding), many of these groups and TSOs started to be invited into the cities' council meetings. They learned how to engage in dialogue with council officers; hence, the gap in managing processes for social service provision between council and these TSOs began to narrow. A municipal government officer in Donostia clearly illustrates this point:

If we want citizens to develop their ideas we include them in a grant-funding system. The grant-funding system is madness. I mean: piles of paperwork, incredible bureaucracy… then they prepare it, we ask them eleven thousand papers that must be ordered in a certain way otherwise they do not pass requirements (GO/D_1).

In Cardiff, technicalization was found through TSOs that were highly merged into the CF system and Cardiff Partnership. One TSO officer explained how in becoming part of Cardiff Partnership his organization had to show managerial capacity to comply with the requirements of corporatism:

Part of the condition of us running it [CF programme] was that we'd have extensive governance, we went through a due diligence process in terms of finance, we had to set up all the systems, HR, finance, governance. Write the plan. We've done all that, it's progressed well, we're running the [CF] cluster, manage the area. So being financially sustainable, but being well-governed, well-managed, effective, credible, valued, respectedL We have that structure and then we can be creative, we can go off and be wild community workers. (TSO/C_7)

In both cities, all types of interviewees perceived bureaucratization and its associated technicalization as negative. In particular, project beneficiaries and activists accused those establishing these processes of 'turning community groups into the council'. But as the previous quote illustrates, in Cardiff, TSO-CF officers also recognized the benefits of 'becoming more corporate, with more structure'.

While our data in both cities confirmed the pre-austerity period helped TSOs and community groups to align their operative and monitoring processes in ways that mirrored council practices (i.e. aligning objectives, preparing business cases, monitoring user feedback, running best practice and fundraising workshops), the Cardiff case is revealed as more systematic than Donostia. Cardiff's experience yields three important points to highlight, the first also evident in Donostia. First, as TSOs' ideas began to infiltrate the policy circles of city governance, they had to become more business-like to be able to influence implementation of particular projects. Second, the start of the austerity period did not only reify the alignment of TSOs' processes into Cardiff Council's ways of doing things, but also became an opportunity to influence new processes that budget cuts demanded, such as commissioning of social services from TSOs and community groups. With regards to older people's services, a TSO officer commented:

So it's not just about what you do to survive, it's about what you do to take a little step back and say, how do you put in- what you can put in to this, in a mix with what can be commissioned, and how do you influence what they are going to be commissioning? They [Cardiff Council] appreciate that at that level, because other than that, they're commissioning into a vacuum. So if they're beginning to think about commissioning and you're giving them a whole load of information and evidence about what's needed to support older people, then that's going to become part of their whole ideology. (TSO/C_3)

Third, the budget cuts prompted the need for new procedural regulation to guide the operation and management of service commissioning from TSOs and asset transfers from local council to private and community groups (i.e. libraries or community centres). This required the production of training and guidelines that up-skilled small TSOs and community groups to take on responsibility for service provision that the council and other TSOs relying on government funding, were no longer able to provide. Some of our interviews with government officers and politicians assumed that the city council had to be in charge of designing this regulation to ensure that small TSOs or community groups working at a neighbourhood level complied with employment, health and safety, insurance procedures, and safety checks of volunteers dealing with vulnerable users (i.e. children). This type of regulation was part of the offloading with which civil society had to be ready to comply. However, Cardiff Council was not fully prepared and started to work on it in 2015 with the publication of the Stepping Up Toolkit (Cardiff Partnership, n/d). For some citizens, such guidelines were important to avoid a 'state of anarchy', for councillors and government officers they were an invitation to chaos.

Risk-shifting and the challenges of buffering conflict

The professionalization and technicalization of TSOs was facilitated in both cities by the passing of responsibility from state actors to non-state actors; but only in Cardiff through the CF programme was it evident that risk was being downloaded and offloaded: from the Welsh Government, to Cardiff Council to TSO-CF.

In Donostia, risk-shifting across levels of government showed in some instances a contrary tendency, that of re-centralization and upward shifting as a way of streamlining processes. For example, the management of basic income benefits was withdrawn from municipal government and instead began to be administered by the Basque-national government. And as mentioned earlier, there were instances where municipal government absorbed social-assistance costs (i.e. food vouchers) that side-lined the work of some TSOs. However, the preference for a paternalistic approach did not stop Donostia Council from experimenting with offloading risk. This was clear through the Energy Waves Programme, which as part of the European Capital Culture Award, provided small grants to citizen groups and shifted part of the cost from the council to the citizenry. La Casa de las Mujeres was another example as staff recruitment costs were handled by the women's association.

In contrast, Cardiff Council's reduced budget prompted the council to integrate CF partnerships into the broader city governance model. This passed the management costs to TSOs (redundancy and HR management), while the Welsh Government maintained the operative costs of the programme's activities. The latter arrangement helped the council to reduce its costs and the liability of unemployment. Although risk-shifting deepened as a result of budget cuts, the city council was also providing a back-up. The council was ready to intervene and help out TSO-CFs through advice and support to ensure that the managerial and operative responsibilities they inherited from the council complied with monitoring, audit and outcome requirements. A council officer explains:

It is working really, really well because it means clusters [TSO in charge of CF] are going to carry on doing what they want without the confines of a big political organization [city council], but they have the support from a big organization in the assistance of process and audits which are not their strong points. (GO/C_2)

TSOs in charge of managing and implementing CF envisaged their role as short term, especially because of reductions in public expenditure that funded many of these TSOs previously. Hence, one of the activities carried out was the empowerment of communities to become self-governing and entrepreneurial by becoming less financially and operationally dependent on TSOs and government. Examples mentioned mainly addressed youth services: holiday provision, leisure activities (music) and language skills.

In Cardiff, the sharing of responsibility and risk-shifting was encompassed initially by the rhetoric of 'co-production' and while it reduced the risk borne by the city council, it was coupled with the challenges and threats to the council that buffering conflict involved. First, a sense of empowerment by local TSOs and community groups was identified during fieldwork. TSOs/ community groups interviewed felt they were influencing the council's way of thinking through the design of new procedural regulation that was needed after commissioning or by gauging opportunities to introduce innovative practices. The fieldwork period also coincided with several localized protests against closures of schools, libraries or community centres. These activities not only increased awareness of the effects of budget cuts, but also made ordinary citizens and communities feel empowered, albeit temporarily, especially after the local council voted in spring 2015 in favour of prolonging resources for some community services to run for another financial year.

Second, as the offloading process continued, Cardiff Council realized that in many cases communities did not know how to run community services, and also lacked the resources and time to do so. Local council officers made efforts to approach citizens and explain the fiscal crisis the city was facing. As a result, the council received expressions of interest from informal community groups to take over services and assets. However, a more careful consideration of what asset transfers involved discouraged these groups' participation. A politician recalled a story of a woman running a youth-training TSO:

I put her in touch with the Council about possibly taking over the [name of play centre]...Two things happened. One is she said the Council said, 'Could you take over all the other play centres as well?' It was like, 'No. Don't have the capacity for that'. But that tells you that they [Council] had some concerns about the capacity of the sort of friends of play centres in other parts of the city. Number two, she's decided she doesn't want to take on the liabilities that go with taking on these existing centres. (P/C_5)

The challenges mentioned revealed that the city council's traditional protocols of monitoring and complying with regulation had to become more flexible to nurture civil society empowerment and creativity to fulfil rollback redux. In this transition, two aspects began to indicate change. Firstly, that new regulation had to find a balance between the strict procedures followed by council/government agencies and partial procedures followed by community organizations who lacked sufficient administrative and managerial capacity to respond to all regulatory and legislative requirements. Secondly, an acknowledgment that some of the services run by TSOs would cease to be free as many of these TSOs did not have the economies of scale to absorb the wages and infrastructure that the council used to support.

The implications of these challenges revealed the vulnerability of Cardiff Council in relation to civil society, which perceived itself as empowered. As new agreements of collaboration and commissioning were negotiated with civil society and TSOs, the role of the council was questioned in setting 'the rules' and therefore its skills in buffering conflict began to show signs of cracks. This situation was not necessarily experienced in Donostia, as untouched provision of social services, accompanied by a national discourse of austerity prompted the regional government to restate, whenever possible, its protagonist role through centralized responsibility.

Placebo dependency, new spaces of negotiation and legitimation

In Cardiff, the imperative to-be-seen-to-be-acting was observed in the Cardiff Debate, launched in mid-2014. It was a three-year programme of events, workshops and discussions on the future of public services involving the Cardiff Council, partner agencies and local communities across the city. In its first year, which coincided with the final phase of fieldwork, people were asked which services matter the most and to put forward ideas on how the council could do things differently to save money in the future. This initiative was not exhaustive, but could be claimed to be innovative as the first Cardiff-wide consultation on the future of local public services.

The Cardiff Debate helped to legitimize the role of the city council. It became crucial after some activist groups questioned the council's role in responding to budget cuts following the end of roll-over grants to TSOs and community groups. Cardiff Council, of all state agencies participating in the Cardiff Partnership, was under the most pressure to show that it was acting fast despite being uncertain how to resolve the challenge of fiscal austerity. Interviewees mentioning 'the council needed to save quickly' or 'the council was glad to get rid of play centres' showed the urgency of the situation. The Cardiff Debate became a space where the negotiating power of the council could be

affirmed, backed up by Stepping Up. Publishing guidelines, consulting the public in innovative ways and allowing new ideas to influence the council's strategy to cope with austerity showed that the council was acting, although without the capacity to carry on delivering social services.

Cardiff Council also capitalized on its past given its history of being a 'good council'. The opinion of an activist is helpful in summarizing this point:

In Wales the state has done quite a good job at protecting the public sector from cuts and delaying them. There is a sense that this is a Westminster Conservative agenda and local authorities have to deal with it. The anger is diffused, not all focused on the local authority. There have been consultations going on, a lot connected with the workforce and people getting redeployed or reduced hours. The local authority has done this not by engaging citizens but because they are decent people in public service. They like the idea of partnership and they don't like to be seen as the bad guy cutting stuff. (SA/C_2)

Local councillors and officers perceived the need to rely on the council's relatively positive, past relationship with civil society through a combination of two narratives: resignation to fiscal austerity and the city's long-term discourse based on partnership and co-production of services. This discourse was not unique to Cardiff, but to Wales more generally as it sought to differentiate from its English counterpart since devolution in 1999.

Unlike Cardiff, there was no imperative for Donostia Council in this regard; but despite its unchanged budget, the council still wanted to be seen to be acting. As a result, it created a protectionist narrative against austerity that built upon the city's participatory system and complemented the Basque protectionist welfare discourse. The council sought ways to be seen to be acting through tactics of participatory planning that did not incur expense. Through projects such as Auzolan and Auzo Elkarteen Bilgunea, the Bildu administration sought to legitimize its role by approaching neighbourhood associations that valued legacies of Basque communitarianism. These associations located in the south of the city had historically been the most marginalized. Although critical of government, they were the most likely to agree with its daily process of delivery while taking advantage of the technical assistance and training that the council offered. Of interest was local government officers' perception that the relationship with these neighbourhood associations was not immune to the higher government level discourse of austerity.

An officer explains:

What I see is a social fabric, building always a relation with the [municipal] administration, conscientious of its limits and with a more responsible behaviour, with a different approach in handling themes, accepting that we can only reach so far; and this is important because in the bonanza years there was a game of demanding to the institution [municipal administration] and treating you [citizens] as a client because I could respond to everything you asked for. Aand in [the current] relationship I have seen more common sense, understanding that the crisis conditions the solutions that can emerge. (GO/D_2)

Implication of findings

In analyzing the preparation of the rollback redux to capture voluntarism and participation, followed by technicalization, we unpicked civil society and community participation during the liminal or transitional period between pre- and post- austerity. The analysis was further complemented by the direction of risk-shifting through procedural rules and narratives that helped identify the 'politics' of

austerity: how it was portrayed, who was to blame and, especially from our data, the strategy that city governments used to engage with contingency.

The findings (Table 2) show that the two cities were preparing for a rollback redux (downloading and offloading) and this preparation entailed deepening technicalization through operative and monitoring processes that mimicked or narrowed the gap between local government and TSOs/community groups. Placebo dependency was present in both cities; however, in Cardiff it was directly associated with the need to be seen to respond to the immediacy of public expenditure cuts.

Citizen participation and voluntarism in service provision fit into narratives of austerity resignation, while holding on to the Welsh historical reputation of a caring and collaborative council. The need of the Donostia Council to be seen to be acting locally was not an imperative due to funding cuts, but the impact of the broader discourse of Spanish austerity upon the council led it to develop a narrative of protectionism that capitalized on the city's participatory system, which in turn revitalized ideals of Basque communitarianism.

The findings show that risk-shifting- comprised a double movement: downwards and beyond the state was non-linear for Donostia. This case showed a re-centralization of certain social-assistance initiatives by municipal government and of basic income support by regional government. This responded in great part to the uneven decentralization of welfare in Spain, which followed a paternalist-like approach in the Basque Country.

However, the non-linearity of the Donostia case does not mean that neoliberal- austerity was absent. The Donostia Council was affected by it; the negative impact of public infrastructure investment cuts at higher levels of government and cuts to street maintenance prompted the council to create new spaces of citizen participation (i.e. Casa de las Mujeres) as a means to seek legitimation. In these spaces, negotiation by neighbourhood associations was limited given their dependence on the council's initiatives to create and invite participation. This dependence facilitated TSOs' mimicry of government procedures that required technical and more professionalized regulation (i.e. business plans, outcome and monitoring reports). The accentuated technicalization of TSOs was the council's preparation strategy for an unknown but potential future that might resemble the linearity evident in Cardiff (see below).

The non-linearity of the Donostia case points towards the importance of multi-level governance as a factor to understand the contradictions of neoliberal austerity. Martí-Costa and Navarro (2015:37) argue that the higher the level of government the more exposed it is to the effects of expenditure cuts. Our analysis confirms this, showing that the Basque region worked as a buffer for Donostia against the broader discourse of austerity experienced in Spain, but also the political ideology of the radical left in the city and its province (Gipuzkoa) reinforced the buffer. The buffer protected municipal social services, albeit re-centralized regional government, while prompting the council to do something about the city's system of participation.

In contrast, the Welsh case, through the CF programme and Cardiff Partnership, showed that risk-shifting followed a more linear path and was more attuned to the Anglo-American proposition stated by Peck. The Cardiff case resulted from regional government's greater alignment to the UK government's policies of down and offloading; however, a more symbolic resistance was found in the combination of fiscal resignation and partnership/co-production narratives at both regional and city levels. This helped to maintain the council's legitimacy during the immediate years after the fiscal crisis.

This linearity weakened Cardiff Council's capacity to co-opt through: the reduction of resources to fund TSOs, the questioning of the council's role in creating new regulation for deepening downloading and offloading of social services, and the need to organize consultation that opened spaces of negotiation with citizens and civil society. Nevertheless, the council relied simultaneously on quick responses that capitalized on previous efforts (trust, mimetism, and the city governance model) to keep afloat its legitimacy in times of uncertainty.

Donostia Council showed a stronger capacity to co-opt because it continued funding TSOs. In this sense, Donostia seemed better to retain the 'jewel of the crown' compared to Cardiff; but in both cases the sense of national identity deployed to differentiate the cities from Spain and from England became a mechanism to legitimize local government's decisions in a period of transition. The delayed effects of the financial crisis on local government spending was an opportunity for both councils to capitalize on their legacies of institutional protectionism obtained by their regional nationalisms. The lack of mass social protest and contestation, reflected through the historical trends of regional and local government funding to TSOs and community groups, showed the cities' regional paternalistic approach to governance.

However, the different devolved fiscal policies and structures in the UK and Spain marked the difference between the cities, and thereby the divergence in how cooptation was experienced.

The city comparison underlines that the fiscal dimension is not the only important factor in understanding how co-optive capacity upon participation fares under austerity, but also national identity. Although it has been argued that the question of identity (nationalism, race, etc.) does not work as a counterweight to the contradictions of a totalizing neoliberal capitalism (Wood, 2016:259), it was relevant in our analysis to illustrate the extent to which the structural inter-scalarity of governance (i.e. fiscal institutions) is complemented by the symbolic side of national identity found in everyday administrative practice (Basque communitarianism or Welsh collaboration). Although we recognize that the effects of nationalism may only work as a temporary resistance to austerity, our research highlights an important subtlety for understanding neoliberalism's practical contradictions.

In discovering how nationalism plays a role in everyday administrative practice alongside the Left political ideology governing the cities, our research began to unpick a way in which the durability of neoliberal austerity is forged and (re)embedded in periods of transition through co-optive mechanisms of participation.

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