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# City Governance, Participatory Democracy, and Cultural Heritage in Barcelona, 1986–2022

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**ABSTRACT**

Citizen participation in Barcelona has undergone a gradual process of institutionalisation that has accelerated over the last ten years. Today, participatory governance in areas such as urban planning and the management of social spaces is a hallmark of the city. However, citizen participation is only now beginning to occur in cultural heritage and comes with certain limitations. Through three diachronic case studies, this article explores the architecture of participation in Barcelona and its contribution to cultural heritage management. It analyses the role of cultural heritage as an actor in participatory processes and explores the degree of citizen participation in cultural heritage management. Our findings reveal that there is no participation *in* heritage itself, but there is participation in issues *in relation to* cultural heritage. This leads us to reflect on the lack of a true participatory turn in cultural heritage management.

## Introduction

Participation as a concept is loaded with diverse semantic significances open to interpretation and, consequently, a diversity of praxis. It can mean anything from civic engagement (as a synonym of 'taking part') to public participation in decision-making (as a synonym of 'citizen control'), from deliberative processes in consultive mechanisms of a project to direct involvement in decisions on public affairs. In political theory, it has been suggested that participation is an inherent value of democracy because it allows citizens and civil society organisations to be involved in political decision-making. These opportunities include involving the public in policy-making, citizen science programmes (i.e. participatory research), and participatory budgeting. In liberal democracies, participation is seen as contributing to the construction of more transparent, efficient, and democratic ways of governing.[1] Among participatory democracy theorists, participation is constituting privileged spaces for civic learning and redistributing political capital, from representative democracy to participative democracy.[2] The range of public involvement and, therefore, how participative a democratic model is, depends on the range of processes involved and the political will behind its implementation. This diversity

depends on the extent to which citizens are empowered,[3] the extent to which the administration is willing to share decision quotas,[4] and the extent to which privileged actors are given broad discretionary authority in executive decisions under the assumption that their expert advice reflects community/general interests.[5]

As a notion and a practice, participation made inroads into cultural heritage management from different directions. Today, it has become a buzzword,[6] which encompasses a diversity of experiences rather than a structured management procedure. It is directly or indirectly referred to when framing management processes in value-based heritage processes, citizen engagement, co-creative designs, collaborative mechanisms, and community-based projects. An initial key direction of participation in cultural heritage was the epistemological turn from the Global South,[7] which challenged Western intellectual traditions and triggered the inclusion of other agents within matters of cultural heritage management and interpretation, from ethnic minorities and indigenous groups to disenfranchised voices.[8] This awakening of the otherness developed what has been called community archaeology, community heritage, and participatory action research.[9] Another key gateway to participation in cultural heritage management occurred when participatory democracy was seen by international bodies as both complementary to representative democracy and as a tool to achieve inclusive and social sustainable development actions.[10] In this managerial setting, participation has advanced as a means of facilitating political consensus in decision-making processes and the implementation and acceptance of governmental policies. Accordingly, international charters like the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (known as the ICH Convention) and the 2015 Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (known as the Faro Convention) include participation as a crucial element for the success of heritage conservation, for quality planning and valuing heritage, and for engaging with citizens' needs as a premise for social sustainability.[11] However, the success of participatory experiences in cultural heritage management following these directrices is varied and greatly depends on power-holders determining and guiding its implementation and the different meanings of 'participation' given by the authorities.[12] Because having a voice in heritage issues under debate does not mean having any power in decision-making processes,[13] the term *tokenism* is commonly used to describe participatory practices in heritage management.[14] Likely in many other participatory experiences, the interface between the citizenry and government structures is key,[15] as it is the level at which the citizenry is allowed to participate in decision-making.[16]

Our case studies were conducted in Barcelona and concerned the management of three historical monuments (two dating to Roman times and one from the early 20th century) affected by urban planning interventions. All three examples analysed involve cultural management affected by implementing urban planning measures, on which neighbourhood movements had a significant impact. These movements helped to reclaim urban spaces as common spaces and combatted actions that promoted the exploitation of such spaces by private parties (i.e. outdoor seating for bars and restaurants or hotels, and parking). In reclaiming the urban by the commons, the cultural heritage elements acted as a catalyst that pressured urban authorities to act, halt urban planning measures, and change architectural plans. Democratic participation occurred in all of them as a grassroots or institutional practice. This tendency results because, since the 1980s, Barcelona has been gradually implementing various forms of participatory

democracy, which is defined by two standards of participation: the first dating to 1986 (amended in 2002) and the second to 2017 (amended and definitively approved in 2020). As discussed below, these regulations define the relationship between governmental bodies and their representatives in urban planning and cultural heritage management, as well as that between government bodies and the citizenry, and specify the channels designed for citizen participation in the public sphere. The three case studies presented here offer examples of public participation in urban areas with elements of cultural heritage used as an instrument by which to achieve the various objectives of the authorities or neighbourhood associations. Each case also reflects different points in the timeline of understanding and practising citizen participation in Barcelona and involves dissimilar and similar practices in using cultural heritage as a framework for reclaiming the public nature of urban spaces through participatory logic and practices.

This article thus seeks to understand cultural heritage's role in participatory processes in Barcelona and discern whether participatory processes change the city's management of cultural heritage. In response to these questions, we first analysed the legal provisions and the grey literature created by the municipality of Barcelona to define and frame participation in city governance (see Table 1). Secondly, three case studies were conducted: the current Plaça Vuit de Març, Plaça Carme Simó, and the former Model Prison. The methodology used for the first two case studies consisted of the combined analysis of the duly contextualised documentation generated by the people in the neighbourhoods to give their actions and claims visibility (i.e. blogs, Twitter, Facebook).[17] One of us (APP) attended public hearings, meetings and participation workshops and developed participatory ethnographic observation.[18] For the third case, the data analysed came exclusively from documentation generated by the participatory process available in the city's digital repository, Decidim.Barcelona.[19]

This paper is organised as follows: the next section summarises Barcelona's political, social and economic situation from the return to democracy in the late 1970s until 2020. This will provide a basis to understand better the legal system for citizen participation implemented over the last thirty years, which structurally affects heritage governance. In the following section, we analyse the three case studies. They serve to examine how citizen participation has not been implemented *in* cultural heritage itself but instead has taken place *in relation to* cultural heritage. In other words, cultural heritage seems to act as an added value to encourage participatory processes in urban spaces, processes with other aims and interests that never include governance of the cultural heritage itself. It will lay the groundwork for a final reflection on the state-of-art citizen participation in Barcelona's cultural heritage governance.

## City Governance and Planning in Barcelona, 1986–2022

The city of Barcelona has a long tradition of popular and association movements – revived in the new democratic period starting in the late 1970s – wherein society plays an active role in managing social and cultural spaces at the local level.[20] In this context, municipal governance practices began to be adopted that sought forms of power as close as possible to the citizenry: municipal administration was decentralised, district councils were strengthened, culture was fostered as a form of social cohesion and coexistence, and, in 1986, regulations for citizen participation were formulated for the first time.[21]

**Table 1.** Barcelona City Council documents related to citizen participation in Barcelona (1986–2022). Prepared by the authors based on information from the Barcelona City Council's open access institutional repository (BCNROC Barcelona https://bcnroc.ajuntament.barcelona.cat/jspui/).

| | Year | Title of document | Action |
|---|---|---|---|
| Legal documents | 1986 | *Normes Reguladores de l'Organització dels Districtes i de la Participació Ciutadana* | (District organisation and citizen participation norms). The first regulations governing and structuring citizen participation in Barcelona. Barcelona City Council 1994, http://hdl.handle.net/11703/90297 |
| | 2002 | *Normes reguladors de participació ciutadana* | (Citizen participation norms). An amended and updated version of the 1986 regulations. The primary mechanism for participation was advisory boards or committees, which bring together entities concerned with a particular issue or segment of the population. Barcelona City Council 2002, http://hdl.handle.net/11703/84850 |
| | 2017 | *Reglament de Participació Ciutadana* | (Citizen participation regulation). A new regulation (April 2017 version) as well as legal arguments presented (October 2017). Annulled in 2019. Barcelona City Council 2017 http://hdl.handle.net/11703/106138 |
| | 2022 | *Reglament de Participació Ciutadana* | (Citizen participation regulation). The current regulation governing and structuring citizen participation in Barcelona. Barcelona City Council 2022 http://hdl.handle.net/11703/126132 |
| Working documents | 2010 | *Pla Director Municipal de Participació Ciutadana 2010–2015* | Analysis of the 1986/2002 regulations, redefinition of the city's participation model, definition of a work plan to safeguard and promote participatory democracy in Barcelona. http://hdl.handle.net/11703/85034 |
| | 2015 | *Procés participatiu per a l'elaboració del Programa d'Actuació Municipal (PAM) i dels Programes d'Actuació dels Districtes (PAD) 2016–2019.* | (Citizen participation process for drafting the Municipal Action Programme (PAM) and the District Action Programmes (PAD) 2016–2019.) Government measure developed by the Department of Participation and Districts to implement the participation processes. The measure established several forums for dialogue and encounters to discuss the needs and priorities of the districts and local associations, and to draw up a joint roadmap with the citizens to guide the government's actions over the next four years. http://hdl.handle.net/11703/84166 |
| | 2016 | *Materials a debat per a l'elaboració de les normes de participació ciutadana* | (Discussion materials for drafting rules of citizen participation). A description of the guiding principles of the Direcció de Democràcia Activa i Descentralització (Directorate for Active Democracy and Decentralisation) to develop and facilitate processes, channels and tools to promote civic engagement and effective implementation of citizen participation throughout the city. It was developed with the aim of compiling previous proposals and discussions from the organisations, collectives, citizens and political groups of the city http://hdl.handle.net/11703/99811 |

*(Continued)*

**Table 1.** (Continued).

| Year | Title of document | Action |
|---|---|---|
| 2017 | *Diagnosi i estratègia de Democràcia Activa sobre els òrgans de participació dels districtes* | (Active Democracy diagnosis and strategy for district participation bodies). Diagnostic report on forums for municipal participation within the districts, future strategy to streamline citizen participation in the different municipal bodies, and a work plan to be created by Active Democracy and Decentralisation Directorate with the aim of debating and implementing the different proposals with the city administration. http://hdl.handle.net/11703/115387 |
| 2018 | *Mesura de Govern per al foment de la participació de persones d'orígens i contextos culturals diversos en els canals de participació* | (Government measure to promote the participation of people from diverse backgrounds and cultural contexts in channels for participation) A government measure to enable compliance with regulations on citizen participation in order to foster greater participation in city affairs by people of diverse origins and cultural backgrounds living in the city of Barcelona. http://hdl.handle.net/11703/113904 |

However, this collaboration between the City Council and the local association movement began to fall apart when the city won its bid for the 1992 Olympic Games. From that point forward, the 'Barcelona model' was gradually implemented, a model for city branding effectuated in the 1990s and 2000s.[22] With local governance, the model meant close collaboration between the public and the private sectors to transform the city's urban structure, first to accommodate the Olympic Games and afterwards to foster economic development. The Barcelona model applied this hybrid model to cultural management, combining public governance with private sector participation to build major cultural infrastructures and put on spectacular cultural events, understood as agents in urban and social regeneration.[23] Critical analyses of this model have emphasised its top-down approaches to project management and local cultural governance, its tendency to invest in major events at the expense of policies that serve social needs, and the increasing instrumental subordination of cultural projects and events to local and international economic agents, especially tourism.[24] This municipal entrepreneurial model was cut short with the financial crisis of 2008. The austerity policies that followed the crisis sparked the *Indignados* Movement (or the 15-M Movement, 2011–2012), which called for an end to austerity measures and to the docility and servitude of politics to global financial markets. In the case of Barcelona, it also meant a critique of the overall Barcelona model that had transformed the city into a mass tourism attraction resulting in housing speculation and gentrification.[25] The 15-M anti-austerity movement led to the formation of what were called *partidos del cambio* (parties of change),[26] which gave rise to the 'new municipalism' in Spain.[27] In May 2015, *Barcelona en Comú*, 'the world's most high-profile new municipalist project',[28] won the municipal elections in Barcelona by defending both the role of participatory democracy in local governance and the creation of 'public-commons partnerships' that allow for citizen involvement and control within the public sector.[29] Since 2015, there have been many examples of participatory practices in Barcelona, everything

from popular petitions and consultations to rename the city's streets to more extensive programmes to promote citizen urban planning initiatives to transform old factories into new facilities, to draft the Barcelona Interculturality Plan, to create the Citizen Assembly for Climate, and, more recently, to promote participatory budgeting.

## The Architecture of Citizen Participation

Relating political and economic vicissitudes to the governance of the city of Barcelona reveals that democratic participation in the city has undergone three key phases: the first phase, which peaked in 1992 and was marked by the return of democratic city councils and the legacy of the anti-Francoist and community association movements of the 1970s; the second phase, which was marked by government inertia for citizen participation and city branding, touristification and gentrification; and the third phase, which was marked by the global economic crisis of 2008, the exhaustion of the neoliberal Barcelona model and the political turnaround of the local government in 2015. Regulations on citizen participation follow the pattern of these three phases of governance. The first regulation was published in 1986 and amended in 2002. A second regulation was drafted in 2017, amended, and approved in 2022. In the meantime, in 2010, the City Council drafted a master plan for citizen participation that amended and redefined the 1986–2002 citizen participation model, which preceded what would later become the 2017–2020 regulations. The master plan was accompanied by several working documents for drafting and implementing Regulation 2917–2020 (see Table 1).

The primary purpose of the 1986 regulation (together with its 2002 amendment) was to ensure that the public body was structured so the municipal authorities would be as close as possible to the citizenry. So, although the 1986 regulations covered citizen participation, the main focus was decentralising the city's management structure by creating representative district councils according to the results of municipal elections. The regulations also created district councils, bodies of collective representation elected directly by the residents.[30] At the same time, the District Association and Business Entity Advisory Council and Working Committees were also established. The former operates on the district level, while the latter work on specific matters (e.g. urban planning and housing and general, youth, culture, sports and health services). These citizen participation councils are merely advisory. They can draft reports (upon request), formulate allegations, monitor municipal management and make proposals and suggestions, but the municipal government decides on final matters. However, only entities and associations registered in the General Citizen Participation Entities List and the District Entities List can apply to participate in municipal advisory councils. Individual citizens can only participate in the management of the municipality through public hearings (like a constituent surgery or town hall meeting, these are public events where citizens can ask questions about the political-administrative management of the city) and through citizens' initiatives (in which citizens can directly request or suggest that the City Council implement specific measures or take certain actions). In summary, the 1986 regulations (updated in 2002) define civic participation in Barcelona as a strategic and structural instrument of the City Council that complements and deepens representative democracy. It

established citizens' rights to participate for the first time. However, it channelled this participation primarily through registered associations and institutions and stipulated that participation would work only as district advisory councils.

Civic participation in Barcelona was internally analysed between 2008 and 2009 to draft a new action plan. The analysis showed that the existing participation model tended to inflate and institutionalise bodies, processes and mechanisms, hampering effective citizen participation at the local government level. In addition, citizens were largely unaware of participation, and entities and associations were given a privileged position as interlocutors in participation policy. Lastly, although participation is understood to constitute a pact between the municipal government representatives and the participants, the analysis found that participatory processes were not structured under any legislation.

The 2015 municipal elections led to a significant reassessment and redefinition of civic participation in Barcelona to establish clear regulations and broaden the sociological profiles of participants (Table 1, working documents between 2015 and 2019). By 2022, a new citizen participation regulation had finally been approved.[31] The new ordinance's purpose was to 'regulate relations between the citizenry and the City Council to facilitate and promote civic participation in political decision-making processes and in managing services and matters of municipal interest' (Art 1). Compared to the 1986–2002 legislation, the new regulation represents a step forward in participatory democratic governance. Firstly, citizen participation is linked to the city's political and administrative decision-making processes, sometimes called 'co-production' between the city government and participating civic stakeholders. Secondly, the regulation applies to all (registered) individuals, either directly or through citizen associations (Article 2), which created a List of registered citizens. It is a register of 'stakeholders' who can use any of the channels of participation available, and it actively invites those registered in the municipality to participate to ensure sociological diversity (Art. 42). At the same time, the 1986–2002 regulations gave legal persons priority in participation. Unlike previous regulations that set out rights, the 2022 document is a regulation that defines and sets out in detail the channels of participation, both broadly (face-to-face and digital) and comprehensively (individualised and tailored to the cultural, functional and intellectual diversity of citizens). These are the same bodies and channels of participation established in 1986–2002, but the neighbourhood councils are reinstated (understood as forums for strengthening the community and promoting civic participation in political processes, Art. 62–66), and they are more open to a broad diversity of citizen participants since any registered individual can propose and advocate for participatory processes for any municipal measure or action. Similarly, the document stipulates methods for participation, which must identify potential stakeholders; a participatory analysis process for the situation to be addressed; participatory workshops for public debate, advocacy, opinions and proposals; and working committees in which members of participatory bodies can draft work plans and schedule specific actions. It establishes that all participatory processes must include a report on the conclusions of the process, feedback on the impact of measures, and self-evaluation of the participatory process itself. Lastly, one of the most interesting aspects of the current architecture of participation, and, to a large extent, the driving force behind the processes developed in recent years, is the digital democratic participation platform Decidim.Barcelona.

## Cultural Heritage and Participative Democracy

The three case studies selected examine three urban sites to illustrate the different phases of the implementation of the participatory model in Barcelona: the first took place while the 1986–2002 regulation was in force; the second took place during the process of redefining the city's participatory model; and the third case took place entirely after the 2017 regulation.

### The Site Adjacent to the Plaça dels Peixos, Currently Known as the Plaça Vuit de Març (2008–2011)

In 1988, two properties on the street Carrer de Duran i Bas adjacent to the Plaça dels Peixos were demolished. The archaeological remains of one of the Roman aqueducts were discovered in a party wall. These archaeological remains were added to the register of cultural heritage sites in urban areas of Barcelona open to the public.[32] The resulting site helped to open up and 'air out' the densely built-up historic quarter, but soon became a congested and poorly managed parking area for motorbikes and bicycles. In 2008, the lack of space available for public use in the area led various neighbourhood associations and business owners to come together and demand that the site no longer be used as a parking area and that it be transformed into an open space for neighbourhood use. Among the arguments for transforming the site into a public square, the neighbourhood residents mentioned the Roman aqueduct's uniqueness and historical and cultural value. They accused the city government of degrading the cultural heritage space and showing little interest in conserving the archaeological remains.[33] The people of the neighbourhood requested that the site be designated for community use and transformed into a green space for a children's playground (there were few playgrounds in the neighbourhood). A blog on the topic says 'all citizens would gain a space of high historical, social and cultural value' since 'an important part of the ancient Roman aqueduct is visible in the square', and requests that 'the final plan and reforms be done in a participatory manner with the citizenry'.[34] The neighbourhood's residents started collecting signatures to present a proposal to the City Council, as stipulated in the 1986–2002 participation regulations. The residents also gave their requests and petitions greater visibility by organising regular community events at the site. These claims culminated in March 2010 in a participatory process overseen by the neighbourhood associations and without the intervention of the municipal government. The process resulted in the removal of the motorbike lot, the relocation of the bicycle rental station, improvements to the lighting, and better use of the square's archaeological remains. In June 2010, the City Council informed representatives of the registered municipal entities that the tendering process for the urban rehabilitation would begin in autumn. The City Council's plan did little to reflect the petitions and proposals put forward by the public: the plan to be offered up for tender proposed a public square for pedestrian traffic rather than a space for community events with an area for a playground in the centre of the square and space for outdoor café seating, as the associations had requested. The only point the two parties had in common was the conservation and restoration of the aqueduct as an integral feature of the new square. In 2011, the new square was inaugurated, now called Plaça Vuit de Març in honour of the Ca la Dona Centre, a historical landmark for the feminist

**Figure 1.** Plaça del Vuit de Març: the children's playground in the foreground and the Roman aqueduct in the background. Photo: Ana Pastor, 2021.

movement in Barcelona, which has its headquarters in an adjacent street. In 2018, thirty years after its discovery, work began on conserving and restoring the aqueduct (Figure 1). That same year, the Casal de Joves youth centre opened its doors, also located in the square, another long-standing request of the neighbourhood associations with neighbourhood facilities.

### The Site of the Roman Wall on the Street Carrer del Sotstinent Navarro in the Current Plaça Carme Simó (2012–2018)

Since the 1950s, Pla Barcino is gradually recovering and enhancing the perimeter of the Roman city wall that surrounds and encloses the city's historic quarter. It involves progressively expropriating and demolishing buildings adjacent to the walls to reveal sections of the exterior city wall hidden behind buildings since late medieval times. The second case analysed arose in 2012 when two properties on Carrer Sotstinent Navarro were demolished, exposing another section of the city wall. According to Pla Barcino, the resulting plot was going to be transformed into 'a urban space linking the city and the monument'.[35] However, in a highly touristified and gentrified neighbourhood affected by traffic nearby and lacking facilities for children, the cultural heritage planned intervention was immediately rejected. To those against, this progressive exposure of the Roman city wall means destroying properties and expelling residents, which would further degrade the local social fabric. Secondly, the waiting period between demolition and the preparation of the monumental area creates an empty, abandoned place, resulting in the sense of negligence by the municipal government. It altogether prompted the neighbourhood associations to call for the vacant plot to be used for other purposes. The request was spearheaded primarily by the parents' association of the students of the Àngel Baixeras school (AMPA Baixeras, in its Catalan acronym), a public primary school opposite the site with no space for children's playgrounds. They requested the vacant plot for community use and as a playground during school hours. At the end of 2014, the

AMPA organised a self-managed internal participatory process on the potential uses of the vacant plot. At the same time, community events and festivals were organised, similar to those held in Plaça Vuit de Març, calling for the Pla Barcino to be changed in that sector and for residents to be involved in the decision-making process (Figure 2). The argument put forward was that opening the Roman city wall to tourists would only serve to increase tourist consumption, while the residents were requesting a public space for those who live in the neighbourhood.[36]

In November 2015, at the request of the residents, the school and the AMPA, the City Council held one of its first institutionalised participatory processes in Barcelona, *Decidim l'urbanització del Carrer Sotstinent Navarro* ('We decide on the urban development of Sotstinent Navarro Street'). It was an experience that undoubtedly inspired the 2017 regulations and future participatory methods. Three participatory workshops were held, open to everyone living in the neighbourhood, between December 2015 and February 2016. The workshops led to the creation of a steering committee to monitor implementation. The participatory process defined how to transform the site into a shared urban square and school playground. The first workshop was a brainstorming session with the AMPA and the children of the school to decide on the playground's design. The second workshop was an open dialogue with the architect, Josep Llinàs, so participants could comment on and suggest modifications to the original urban design. The third workshop evaluated and approved the new urban planning proposal resulting from the previous workshops. One of the crucial issues debated was the fencing off of the space by its intended use: a school playground (public use), which would also be a community space (neighbourhood use), without letting the space be subsumed by the logic of privatisation (tourism).[37] The City Council's proposal to fence off the square, i.e. to create a public space with restricted access (understood as a public space with organised tours of the Roman wall), was viewed by the residents of the neighbourhood as prioritising the needs and comforts of tourists over those of the residents. The final design included a low fence to create a public open space that does not invite entry (Figure 3). The Baixeras school



**Figure 2.** On the left background, AMPA Àngel Baixeras pictures' campaing 'Vivim aquí' (We live here), included in the international campaign *inside & out* (http://www.insideoutproject.net/). On the banner: 'Reclaiming public space. Let's make a square!'. The Roman city wall is in the background. Photo: Ana Pastor, 2017.

**Figure 3.** Plaça Carme Simó, April 2021. Photo: Ana Pastor.

currently manages and uses the square exclusively during school hours as a playground, while it is a public space for the remaining hours of the day and night. The square was inaugurated at the end of 2018, and named Carme Simó, after a former teacher at the Baixeras school. Currently, the use, safety and maintenance of the square/playground are a source of controversy between the AMPA, the school, and the City Council.

### La Presó Model (2017–2022)

The participatory process for new uses of the former Model Prison represents a more mature phase of democratic participation in Barcelona since it is ruled by the Participation Regulation of 2017. *La Model* (as it is popularly known) is a prison building that has been part of Barcelona's social and political history from its opening in 1904 to June 2017, when



**Figure 4.** La Model prison in Barcelona. November 2012. Photo: Vicente Zambrano González. Source: https://www.barcelona.cat/imatges/ca/.

it was closed (Figure 4). As a heritage place, the prison's values lie in being both an example of the model prisons using panoptic structures from the early twentieth century and a testimony to the history of Franco's political repression and the democratic transition period of the 1970s and 1980s in Catalonia.[38]

The decision to close the prison dates to the mid-1970s but was not done until 2017. By 2000, the municipal government drafted a series of master plans containing different proposals for preserving the building and for its potential future use. The lengthy process of closing the prison led to the formation of interest groups comprised of neighbourhood associations and local history and memory associations, united under the platform *Fem nostre l'espai de la Model* ('Let's make La Model our space').[39] They demanded the creation of green urban spaces, including public facilities (e.g. schools, social housing, and premises for social organisation) and restoring the prison's historical memory. The neighbourhood organisations participating in the process formed a steering group to manage the participatory process with the City Council. From February to July 2018, the participatory process[40] debated converting the former prison into a large structure housing various facilities and services and a green space for the neighbourhood (Figure 5). Several participatory workshops discussed the new required uses and the adaptation of the old build. One participatory workshop dealt exclusively with the prison's architectural and cultural heritage. It included discussions on which areas of the prison had cultural value and should be preserved (e.g. the panoptic structure) and on setting up an interpretative centre on the political repression under Franco's regime. To launch these debates, experts in historic building preservation presented their reports, toured the facilities with the participants, and discussed cultural heritage values and possible measures for each space. As a result of the participatory process, a project brief, first and after a master plan, were created describing the uses and requirements for transforming the former prison.[41] Based on this master plan, the design of the architectural project was put out to tender in 2022.[42]

In another publication,[43] we have provided a more extensive evaluation of all the data from the participatory workshops. It reveals a precise match between what the architectural and cultural heritage experts thought should be preserved and the final decisions of the participatory workshops. The resulting project brief and the master plan determine the preservation of those architectural structures previously defined by experts as



**Figure 5.** *La Model* participatory workshop, 2018. Photo: Lacol/Barcelona City Council.

relevant and listed already in the *Catalogue of the Architectural Heritage – Eixample District* (elaborated in 2000). These listed buildings and areas welcome the new uses sought by the workshop participants (e.g. schools, social housing, social centres) by transforming their interiors. The particulars and the goals of the future *La Model, Espacio Memorial* Centre, dedicated to the memory of the penitentiary and, especially, to describing Franco's political repression, were hardly debated in the participatory workshops: it was offered by the municipal authorities as the only obvious choice to be endorsed. Summarising, the outcomes of the participatory process regarding cultural heritage are very similar to those included in the 2009 plan set by the City Council. The participatory process followed a pattern of informing citizens of experts' opinions and decisions. After, citizens' voices served to sign off experts' proposals. Citizens only added to these heritage plans the new desired uses.

## Discussion: Cultural Heritage and (Non-) Participation

The cases presented here reveal two essential aspects of the triangle of municipal governance, the citizenry and cultural heritage and urban planning in Barcelona. The first is the position (or rather, the use) of cultural heritage in citizens' requests for public use of urban space. The second is the position of cultural heritage according to the logic and practices of participatory democracy developed in Barcelona since the 1980s.

In the three cases studied, the main goal of citizen action was to make the city inhabitable again rather than something to be consumed. They are actions in which the citizenry seeks to exercise their right to the city.[44] In the case of the *La Model*, more than 14,000 square metres of penitentiary space in the heart of the Eixample District was returned to public use rather than transforming it into hotels and shops as proposed in the 2009 preliminary plan. Cultural heritage issues were relevant as the former penitentiary is a historical place included in the city's catalogue. In contrast, the first two cases are examples of citizens' rights to the city in a neighbourhood heavily impacted by a neoliberal tourism model. In those two cases, cultural heritage plays an ambiguous role as an ally and a ground. In the Plaça Vuit de Març, the residents appealed to Barcelona, an epicentre of cultural heritage, to return an urban site to the citizenry. Citizens argued to the local authorities responsible for cultural heritage conservation that a well-maintained and managed site would make a greater contribution to the preservation and management of the Roman aqueduct instead of a parking plot. In the case of Plaça Carme Simó, cultural heritage was seen as an ally of gentrification and mass tourism. Moreover, although the residents agreed on the cultural values of the archaeological area, some feared that the new square would become a cultural heritage site exclusively, as had happened with other publicly accessible archaeological sites in the neighbourhood. In fact, the AMPA was more interested in recovering the public square than in conserving the Roman city wall.[45]

Next to these conflicts of interest between the public and private spheres in the city administration, one must add the logic and practices of participatory democracy developed and applied in Barcelona since the mid-1980s. The first case follows the guidelines set out in the *Normativa de Participació Ciutadana* of 1986/2002, in which signatures are collected to lodge a formal petition (while, at the same time, using all available channels to be heard), the local government communicates only with registered representatives, and proposals were presented to the residents of the neighbourhood. However, the City

Council hardly listened to either the comments or the proposals outlined by the locals after their self-managed participatory process. According to the ladder of citizen participation,[46] this participatory model would be labelled as tokenistic or symbolic. In the second case study, the participatory dynamic is at the crossroads of two logics: on the one hand, the 1986/2002 regulations were still in force, but the Citizen Participation Master Plan (2010–2015) had already been drafted, which set out a series of shortcomings and insights for a new participatory model. The case of Plaça Carme Simó is a transitional, hybrid, participatory process applying new participatory logic and methods but still containing peremptory attitudes regarding urban planning final decisions. Participatory workshops were designed to give the AMPA, young people and residents a voice. Their requests were collected and discussed with the architect in charge, and attempts were made to adapt an existing urban intervention plan to the participants' requests. Despite this, requests to include basic schoolyard facilities were ruled out because they altered the original idea of an archaeological promenade. Accordingly, the local authorities turned participation into a symbolic process, side-lining options that opposed the long-term plan (the Pla Barcino). Lastly, *La Model* adhered to the participation regulations ratified in 2017 and facilitated and promoted citizen participation in municipal decision-making. The participatory model was not aiming to sign off an urban plan determined by experts. Instead, participants defined parameters, understood and discussed the most important criteria and necessities with experts, and drew conclusions that became the new project brief and architecture master plan. Although participants' decisions occurred extensively on defining the uses and needs of the new *La Model*, that was not the case for cultural heritage. Participation here was limited and focused on highlighting certain architectural elements and ratifying experts' opinions (Pastor Pérez and Colomer n.d.).

In 2022 the Directorate for Urban Architecture and Heritage Services, depending on the Department of Urban Planning Management, published the *Mesura de Govern*. *Ciutat Patrimoni* ('Heritage City Government Measure'). This document redefines the city's cultural heritage policy for the first time, referring exclusively to historic buildings and urban green spaces (parks).[47] The document, however, barely includes citizen participation, and when it does, it refers only to the creation of the new Citizens' Committee for Cultural Heritage. This Committee is formed by those organisations and citizens with expertise in preserving Barcelona's urban cultural heritage, as well as the City Council technical services (basically architects from the Department of Urban Planning). Created in 2022, the Committee has become only a forum where participants citizens ask, suggest and refer to problems to the municipal government, which exemplifies a tokenist understanding of citizen engagements.[48] On the other hand, the Department of Culture launched a program called the *Memòria Viva* ('Living Memory').[49] It provides a participative forum in dialogue with community organisations on issues related to local collective memory and how to incorporate it into public spaces. However, the outcome initiatives have little connection with those administrative bodies managing the city's cultural heritage (e.g. museums and archives). The Heritage City Government Measure and its Committee and the Living Memory initiative confirm our previous observations after analysing the case studies: a missing connection between participatory and community processes, on one side, and the expert's municipal practice, on the other side, regarding cultural heritage governance.

## Conclusions

Barcelona's regulatory system for citizen participation has gradually evolved from the 1980s to the present day, from primarily symbolic to incorporating greater citizen empowerment at the municipal government level. This tendency also includes decision-making on matters of municipal interest, especially regarding the use of public urban space. However, as this article has shown, it does not include cultural heritage issues. The three case studies reflect different stages of participation in Barcelona, but they all have one thing in common: the symbolic role of cultural heritage. Citizen participation does not occur *in* matters directly affecting cultural heritage but *in relation to* matters affected by or affecting heritage. Heritage is mentioned as an added value in urban planning and as an incentive to participate because heritage is at stake. However, participants do not participate in debates concerning heritage values and conservation decisions, or in any aspect of its short- or long-term management. These are issues decided only by experts. Instead of debating, citizens endorse. The role of cultural heritage in participatory processes is both reduced to a loose discourse of adding value to other matters and used by citizens and the public authorities to justify party interests. Since managing cultural heritage falls under the purview of local government as part of the city's political and urban planning project, urban cultural heritage ultimately caters to the interests of the city government, as has been evident since the late 1990s.[50] The existence of a reinvigorated participatory democracy since the 2010s seems to have had little impact on the management of cultural heritage itself. Heritage managers follow their professional guidelines regarding documenting and valuing heritage and decide when to preserve it and how to articulate its enhancement in urban planning and local development. It results in a non-participatory relationship for a citizenry that rubber stamps solutions backed by expert knowledge presented as both free and inevitable.[51] In this regard, participation in Barcelona had no impact on managing cultural heritage before 2017, and it continues to have no impact afterwards. Since Barcelona's participation aims to promote new forms of policy-making and public service management as commons, it is expected that the City Hall further implements participation logic and practices among those administrative sectors dealing with historic environments.

## Notes

1. Fung, "Putting the public back into governance"; Bekemans, "Citizens' participation and participatory governance in the EU."
2. Pateman, "Participatory democracy revisited"; Baiocchi, "Participation, activism, and politicsParticipation, activism, and politics."
3. Arnstein, "A ladder of citizen participation."
4. Baiocchi and Ganuza, "Participatory budgeting as if emancipation mattered."
5. Carr, "Public input/elite privilege"; Rico-Motos et al., "Expertise and participatory governance."
6. Cortés-Vázquez, Jiménez-Esquinas, and Sánchez-Carretero, "Heritage and participatory governance."
7. Freire, *Pedagogia do oprimido*.
8. Layton *Who Needs the Past?*; Posnansky, "Toward an archaeology of the black diaspora"; Ucko, "Foreword"; Byrne, "Western hegemony in archaeological heritage management"; Conkey and Gero, "Programme to practice"; Arnold-Scham, "The archaeology of the disenfranchised"; Smith *Uses of Heritage*.

9. see, Tully, "Community archaeology"; Pyburn, "Archaeology by, for, and about the public,"; "Engaged archaeology"; Johnston and Marwood, "Action heritage"; Smith and Waterton, *Heritage, Communities and Archaeology*; McGhee, "Participatory Action Research and archaeology"; Atalay, *Community-based Archaeology*; Chevalier and Buckles, *Handbook for Participatory Action Research, Planning and Evaluation*; Rivolta et al., *Multivocalidad: y activaciones patrimoniales en arqueología*.

10. Saurugger, "The social construction of the participatory turn."

11. see, Glass and Newig, "Governance for achieving the sustainable development goals"; Deacon and Smeets, "Authenticity, value and community involvement in heritage management under the world heritage and intangible heritage conventions."

12. Adell et al., *Between Imagined Communities and Communities of Practice*; Neal, "Heritage and participation"; Sánchez-Carretero et al., *El imperativo de la participación en la gestión patrimonial*; Bortolotto et al., "Proving participation"; Colomer, "Exploring participatory heritage governance after the EU Faro Convention."

13. Pastor Pérez et al., "Democratising heritage values."

14. Jiménez-Esquinas and Quintero-Morón, "Participación en patrimonio"; Sánchez-Carretero and Roura-Expósito, "Participación."

15. Baiocchi and Ganuza, "Participatory budgeting as if emancipation mattered"; Callahan, "Citizen participation"; Colomer, "Exploring participatory heritage governance after the EU Faro Convention."

16. Arnstein, "A ladder of citizen participation."

17. Kurtz et al., "Blogs as elusive ethnographic texts."

18. Musante, "Participant observation"; see also Pastor-Pérez, *Conservación arqueológica social*; Pastor-Pérez and Ruiz Martínez, "La participación como tarea de lo cotidiano"; Pastor-Pérez and Ruiz-Martínez, "Analysing heritage and participation in the Gothic Quarter of Barcelona."

19. Launched in 2016, the repository (https://www.decidim.barcelona/) is a platform that provides digital services for participatory processes to debate, contrast and compile proposals from the Barcelona City Council. As such, it is used to gather and organise all information, records, processes, initiatives, bodies and channels for citizen participation stipulated by the 2022 regulation and make them available to the public. See also Charnock, March, and Ribera-Fumaz, "From smart to rebel city?"

20. Andreu-Acebal and Huertas-Claveria, *Barcelona en lluita*; Calavita and Ferrer, "Behind Barcelona's success story."

21. Borja, "The city, democracy and governability"; Subirós, *Estratègies culturals i renovació urbana*.

22. Marshall, *Transforming Barcelona*; Balibrea, *The Global Cultural Capital*.

23. Rodriguez-Morató, "La reinvención de la política cultural a escala local"; Sánchez-Belando, Rius-Ulldemolins, and Zarlenga, "¿Ciudad creativa y ciudad sostenible?"

24. Capel, *El modelo Barcelona*; Delgado, *La ciudad mentirosa*; Blanco, "Does a 'Barcelona Model' Really Exist?"; Degen and García, "The transformation of the 'Barcelona model."

25. Charnock, Purcell, and Ribera-Fumaz, "¡Indígnate!."

26. Feenstra and Tormey, "From social mobilisation to institutional politics."

27. Blanco, Gomà, and Subirats, "El nuevo municipalismo"; Thompson, "What's so new about New Municipalism?"

28. Angel, "New municipalism and the state," 524.

29. Eizaguirre, Pradel-Miquel, and García, "Citizenship practices and democratic governance."

30. The district councils were no longer found in the 2002 regulation on participation, leaving only the City Council and sectoral councils (2002 Barcelona City Council). The neighbourhood councils were reinstated as one of the municipal channels for citizen participation in 2017–2022.

31. The participation regulations approved in 2017 were annulled by the High Court of Catalonia in October 2019 (Judgment no. 874/2019). This led to the creation of an amended regulation in 2022. As such, several white documents were created between 2017 and 2022. Table 1 includes those relevant here.

32. Miró i Alaix, "El Servei d'Arqueologia de Barcelona, un servei municipal per fer conèixer l'arqueologia i el patrimoni al ciutadà." Miró i Alaix "La Muralla Romana en el marc del Pla Barcino La Muralla Romana en el marc del Pla Barcino"
33. See https://delspeixos.wordpress.com/
34. See https://delspeixos.wordpress.com/2010/11/11/breu-recordatori-de-la-campanya-i-el-proces-de-participacio/ (accessed March 20, 2023).
35. As described in 2020 by Josep Llinàs, architect in charge: https://afasiaarchzine.com/2020/11/josep-llinas-placa-carme-simo-barcelona/ (accessed March 25, 2023).
36. See https://vivimaqui.wordpress.com/2015/09/08/statement/ (accessed 26/03/2023).
37. See https://vivimaqui.wordpress.com/2016/01/25/article-imprescindible-per-el-debat-sobre-els-usos-del-solar/ (accessed March 26, 2023).
38. Fontova *La Model de Barcelona*.
39. See https://presomodel.wordpress.com/
40. All documentation related to the participatory process, including the expert reports, is available on Decidim.Barcelona: https://www.decidim.barcelona/processes/lamodel. See also https://www.lacol.coop/projectes/proces-participacio-model/
41. Model Urbà *Pla Director de la Model* 2019.
42. The winning project 'Model, Batega' is available at https://www.lamodel.barcelona/ca/model-batega
43. Pastor-Pérez and Colomer, "Dissecting symbolic participation in cultural heritage."
44. Harvey, "The Right to the City."
45. Ramos-Ruiz, Llinàs, and Miró i Alaix, "La muralla romana en el marc del Pla Barcino", 238).
46. Arnstein, "A ladder of citizen participation."
47. *Barcelona government measure Heritage City*. http://hdl.handle.net/11703/125079
48. See https://www.decidim.barcelona/assemblies/taula-patrimoni/f/5254/?locale=ca (accessed May 29, 2023).
49. See https://www.barcelona.cat/culturaviva/ca/projecte/memoria-viva?viewMode=full (accessed May 29, 2023).
50. see, Colomer, "Stones, Books and Flags."
51. Carr, "Public input/elite privilege."

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## Disclosure Statement

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