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**The Jewel of the Crown: Co-optative capacity during austerity in
Cardiff and San Sebastian-Donostia**

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Abstract:

By comparing Cardiff and San Sebastián-Donostia (SSD), the paper argues that local governments' capacity to co-opt provides a relevant approach to understanding changes in citizen participation under fiscal austerity. The argument is based on the close interrelationship among co-optation, legitimacy and procedural regulation. These concepts help to understand how citizen participation is maintained in periods of instability, experienced by city governments during and in the aftermath of the 2010 financial crisis. Local government's legitimacy is maintained insofar as it shows capacity to co-opt through negotiation, capture, technicalisation of processes and minimisation of conflict. These elements work in tandem with factors of urban austerity embedded into a longer-term neoliberalising discourse (Peck, 2012). Our findings show that both city governments maintain their legitimacy but in this process Cardiff Council's co-optative capacity weakens in contrast to SSD.

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Introduction

By comparing the cities of Cardiff and San Sebastián-Donostia (SSD), the paper argues that local governments' capacity to co-opt provides a relevant approach to understanding changes in citizen participation under fiscal austerity. The argument is based on the close interrelationship 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. Local government's legitimacy is maintained insofar as it shows capacity to co-opt through negotiation, capture, technicalisation of processes and minimisation of conflict. These elements work in tandem with those factors that have been identified in cities experiencing austerity under a longer-term neoliberalising discourse (Peck, 2012). The interwoven framework between capacity to co-opt and 'austerity urbanism' is used in this paper to understand variation across the two cities in their administrative processes defining co-optative capacity.

The comparison is interesting to develop given that both cities symbolise the pride ('the jewel of the crown') necessary to consolidate the national identities of Wales and the Basque Country. In choosing these two cities, the paper contrasts how their power struggle to maintain co-optative and regulatory powers is shaped by their constitutional (in)dependence from national and subnational tiers of government - which have protected them against or delayed the effects of the 2008 financial crisis. Furthermore, their reliance on the tourism industry (due to sport, culture or gastronomy) and their 'weak' social movements, albeit for different historical reasons, contribute to frame the debate on how participation, alongside boosterism, unfolds in periods of fiscal austerity.

The paper first presents the framework behind co-optative capacity. This framework is then juxtaposed with Peck's factors composing austerity urbanism. The following section provides a brief contextualisation of each city's fiscal, political and participatory structures. This works as a foundation in which the findings section, contrasting the two cities, is developed. Finally, the discussion of findings and conclusions offer reflection on the significance of the juxtaposed framework of co-optative capacity under austerity.

Co-optation, legitimacy and regulation

Recent studies of austerity and crisis have focused on the variegated effects of austerity on cities (Bayirbag et al, 2017; Davies and Blanco, 2017). The procedural administrative mechanisms used by local government in order to cope with this type of phenomenon have received less emphasis. In emphasising the latter, this paper uses 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 is mainly studied in terms of two types of change: in the financial resources of local authorities which directly affects service provision; and in the discourse (policy and practice) of austerity, materialised in policy documentation

and administrative arrangements that regulate the extent to which downloading and offloading of responsibilities are passed from governmental to non-governmental actors (individuals or collectives).

The paper focuses 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 recognise or legitimise their 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, co-optation '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 is centred on the 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 the capacity to govern by a local authority, which in this paper 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 organisational arrangements which are the outcomes of coordinated social and political relations that capitalist economies encounter (Painter, 1998)

Following Selznick's argument, the links between capacity to govern and co-optation become evident when government invites the participation of organised 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 crisis (such as 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 vis-à-vis the increased role of civil society groups, who were invited to participate in service provision, before or during the crisis.

To understand capacity to co-opt it is important to unpack what Selznick's definition of co-optation comprises. For this purpose, we borrow ideas from debates posed in public administration. There are four characteristics relevant to our argument. The first is the assumption that co-optation implies some degree of negotiation between a powerful party (i.e. government) and a less powerful party (i.e. citizens). This means that co-optation implies an unequal relation which the literature tends to portray as domination through consensus or coercion (Auyero, 2011; Selznick, 1949). The second element is capture, in this case, of non-governmental actors and their resources into state sponsored initiatives. This capture may involve either corrupt practices such as offering public monies in exchange for political support, or 'law-abiding' practices that gradually convince the less powerful party to adopt the beliefs

and practices of the powerful. Both types of capture contribute to maintaining or building government's recognition and legitimacy.

The third element is the technicalisation of service delivery processes that involve the participation of citizens or civil society in contexts where discourses of democratic participation and neoliberalisation co-exist (Clarke and Newman, 1997; Kothari, 2005). Technicalisation pinpoints practices related to the 'monopolisation of expertise and authority by professionalising interventions of state actors', which, at least initially, tend to be alien and incomprehensible to non-state actors or citizens; limiting as a result any critical, challenging or emancipatory approaches that the latter might have brought about (Kothari, 2005). Finally, co-optation aims to minimise or buffer conflict during processes of service provision albeit never eradicating it completely (Spicer, 2010). The minimisation of conflict is not necessarily associated with a negative value (i.e. limiting emancipation, depoliticising a process). There are times when its buffering may be positive in order to avoid violence, promote respect of (regulatory) processes 'despite detestation of their outcome' (i.e. elections) or to sacrifice everyday commitments 'for the long-term preservation of allies' (Hampshire, 1999:49-50 & 73). These four characteristics feed into our framework to understand variation across compared cases in their capacity to co-opt under austerity.

Neoliberal austerity and co-optative capacity

The impact that neoliberal reforms have had upon the state - 'deregulation' of the economy, decentralisation and offloading of responsibilities, and internationalisation - have restructured the state's role from provider to facilitator, associated with the roll-back and roll-out strategies of the state (Jessop, 2002; Peck and Tickell, 2007); 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 from incumbent elites (Robinson, 2004; Harrison, 2010), tiers of government (Newman, 2014), and marginalised or vulnerable groups (della Porta and Mattoni, 2014).

Conflict and resistance against neoliberalism have been present over the last 30 years, albeit in some cases not manifested as protest or riot (Morton, 2003). It is in these cases where local governments have sought co-optative mechanisms to capture dissidents and gradually convince them to adopt processes of governance that have commonly accompanied neoliberal governing regimes, characterised by waves of roll-back and roll-out strategies (Brenner et al., 2010; Davies, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2005). In epochs of financial crisis, such as that of 2008, conflict and resistance have taken the form of protests and riots by the marginalised in important urban centres (della Porta and Mattoni, 2014). But in secondary cities, such as Cardiff and SSD, the conflict has been encapsulated in imperative governing decisions by incumbent governments elites that invite participation and volunteering. The rationale of our argument is based on the assumption that as crises (financial included) bring uncertainty (Bayirbag, et al., 2017), they may destabilise the governance mechanisms that local governments have used in order to establish

social order, which among other factors include procedural administrative regulations that contribute to building local government’s legitimacy on an everyday basis.

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 could function into question. Peck (2012) claims that these challenges would be felt primarily by subnational levels of government, in particular those located in urban settings which have concentrated partnerships and contracted-out forms of organisation in service provision. He argues that one of the effects of fiscal austerity upon neoliberal-led strategies and projects has been the *deepening* of decentralisation through devolved fiscal policies or ‘soft budgetary measures’ that distribute financial risk in the delivery of services, from national to local levels (downloading) and from the local level of government to community/ third sector organisations and private sector contractors (off-loading). 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) are to pay this price will depend on the configuration of an operational matrix developed by a city’s government and its broader context.² Through his initial analysis, Peck begins to discern the factors characterising the matrix of austerity urbanism (Table 1).

Table 1. Austerity urbanism (Peck 2012:648-49)

Factors	Brief description
1. Downsizing and leaner local states	Service rationalisation in the public workforce with negative impacts on equality
2. Fire-scale privatisations	Privatisations include sale of government assets
3. Rollback redux	Neoliberal strategies and projects that a generation ago were rolled out, such as grants that characterised public-community partnerships are now rolled back
4. Tournament financing	State and non-state actors compete for grants to maintain a city’s entrepreneurial character and social stability
5. Risk-shifting rationalities	They promote downloading and off-loading tactics which impact the poorest of the population
6. Austerity governance	Extended forms of management by audit and rules of accountancy are consolidated
7. Placebo dependency	Local governments increasingly show a mismatch between the capacity to act locally and the imperative to be seen to be acting locally

² Context defined by history, political ideology, government resources, economy and social participation/activism. These factors have been recognised in the debates on actually existing neoliberalism (Brenner et al., 2010; Guarneros-Meza and Geddes, 2010)

Of the seven factors characterising Peck's austerity urbanism, four are worth explaining given their relationship with co-optative capacity: rollback redux, risk shifting rationalities, austerity governance and placebo dependency. We believe that these four factors are more strategic in nature, whereas the other three are more tactical:

Rollback neoliberalism has been explained by Peck and Tickell (2007) as the rollback of the state in providing specific goods and services, immediately followed by a rollout strategy that led to the restructuring of the state from the 1980s. This rollout strategy prepared the field to download and offload responsibilities to third sector and community organisations; a prime example being the proliferation of public-private and community-public partnerships across different cities in the western hemisphere. For Peck, **rollback redux**, derived from the 2008 crisis, aims to rollback the strategies that a generation ago were rolled out. For example, from the state giving grants to community groups to build community-public partnerships to the withdrawal of these grants but maintaining, where possible, collaborative links with the community to carry on delivering local services. In making links with capacity to co-opt, it can be argued that in some cases, the rollout process worked as a means to capture dissident citizens, while beginning to prepare them for the technical and expert knowledge required for inter-sectoral collaboration to occur (Barners et al, 2007; Kothari, 2005). If conflict is to be found, it tends to be concentrated in the implementation stage (Spicer, 2010).

Peck identifies **austerity governance** as when neoliberal economic discourses extend to forms of management by audit and rules of accountancy and are gradually consolidated. This interpretation has also been discussed in detail by scholars of public administration and development studies. As mentioned above, these managerial practices have been associated with professionalising and technicalising interventions of state actors 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 types of practices have been associated with the 'new public management' wave that with economic globalisation reached countries beyond the global north (Jreisat, 2001). Like national governments in the global south that had to deal with this technocracy alongside imperatives of efficiency and budget austerity to overcome either economic stagnation or financial crisis, two decades later local governments in Europe have had to couple their managerial processes with new budgetary constraints. It is the technicalisation 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-optative capacity.

In the global north, the responsibility to couple managerial processes with budgetary constraints has been passed down to subnational levels of government. Peck coins this as **risk shifting rationalities** where management processes included in the

governance of a city promote downloading and offloading tactics. This point therefore implies that professionalising and technicalising interventions are not only passed down from national to subnational levels of government, but also from state actors to non-state actors. The management of expenditures, the monitoring of processes to achieve outputs and outcomes begins to be carried out by third sector organisations, which play an intermediary role between the state and community actors (Bovaird, 2014; Chaskin and Greenberg, 2015). While aiming to pass over responsibility to third sector and community organisations, Peck argues that it is likely that the poorest of the population will be impacted the most as they tend to have less skills and resources to inherit the managerial responsibilities of the state. As a response, governments have identified the need to recruit officers whose skills span organisational or sectorial boundaries to bridge the requirements of government with the interests or needs of non-state partners (Durose, 2011; Skelcher et al., 2013). In particular, these officers ensure that community self-management begins, albeit subject to the procedural regulations established by the (local) state. However, this process allows room for negotiation and consequently tensions may traduce into conflict as non-state actors combine tactics and mechanisms of self-management with those sponsored by the state (Elwood, 2006).

Peck argues that **placebo dependency** is where local government will increasingly show a mismatch between the 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 when reflected in the capacity to co-opt through austerity discourse and practice. To carry on 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 or localities experience and adopt. Barbehon and Munch (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 (i.e. collaboration) 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, where local governments show at first resignation to fiscal austerity. Over time as they comply with it 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 third sector organisations or community groups while changes to procedural regulation are carried out to deepen downloading and offloading tactics.

Comparing Cardiff and San Sebastian-Donostia

Two aspects led us to compare Cardiff and SSD.³ The first was the cities' protection from or delayed effects of the 2008 financial crisis upon the cities' budgets and the second, their lack of social protest or mobilisation against some of the effects of fiscal austerity upon the population (i.e. withdrawal of social services and housing). This latter aspect has been particularly noticeable in DSS when compared to other cities across Spain which have experienced high levels of protest through the 15M and Indignados movements (Davies and Blanco, 2017). It is also worth mentioning the social and political statuses of both cities. Cardiff is the 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 complementary services such as insurance, real estate, and increasingly sport and cultural tourism and gastronomy.

SSD although not a capital city, located just over 100km from Bilbao, has historically been recognised as the aristocratic venue concentrating 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). Although the cities' sizes and economic activities are reasonable characteristics to compare them, the rationale we used in building comparison is focused on 'comparativism' (Robinson, 2011), which moves away from traditional comparative patterns centred on similarity and standardisation. Instead it focuses on a similar problematic, which both cities presented during the period of study (2013-2016): delayed effects of the financial crisis upon local expenditure and lack of social protest. This problematic requires of a contextual review to help identify difference in processes and practice. Four key aspects are relevant to this paper: the fiscal structure of the city and region, political ideology of the governing elites, their duration in holding office and the institutionalisation of citizen participation within the cities' governance.

Analyses of the 2008 financial crisis highlight the Basque Country and Navarra as the territories that encountered the least negative economic impact across Spain. This is result of the regions' economic diversity which includes stable export markets and a low dependency on the construction sector (Méndez et al., 2015). By 2012-13, SSD showed higher levels of GDP per capita and household income than the rest of the Basque Country and Spain and the lowest rates of unemployment (Table 2). Concomitantly, these two territories have a relatively high level of fiscal autonomy compared to other autonomous communities in Spain. This confers them a financial capacity of 50-60 per cent above average, which facilitates the design of a revenue system that responds to agreed and convened decisions taken by their national assemblies, 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 of public infrastructure which affected the Basque national and local tiers of government. The unique circumstances in welfare have protected several Basque cities, including SSD, from the negative impacts that the crisis

³ The research was funded through the Spanish government's National Research and Development Plan (project CSO2012-32817). For more information on the overall project visit <https://transgob.net>

generated upon social and housing services. Hence, during fieldwork SSD did not face reduced expenditure in social services. However, 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. However, with the 2014/15 Welsh Government budget, it became evident that austerity was going to hit Welsh local government. 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 (Henry in Pill and Guarneros-Meza, 2017). 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 rationalise and reorganise public services, taking advantage of its city-wide governance model and the Cardiff Debate, a citizen consultation exercise, which helped the council to prioritise the service provision, especially 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 to civil society organisations and community groups (Pill and Guarneros-Meza, 2017).

Between 1991 and 2015, SSD was ruled by minority governments led by either of the two 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 prompted the Left to encounter continuous negotiation with other Right-centred political parties (Tellería and Blas, 2016). Cardiff, since 1995, has been dominated by the Left through the Labour Party (except 2004-2008 in which the Liberal Democrats ruled with a minority), 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 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 hence, the structure of citizen participation flourished in SSD when PSE-EE took office in 1991. Bildu was in power during the period of study and its administration (2011-2015) was characterised by introducing more radical participatory plans and programmes than the PSE-EE, which responded to the formal institutionalisation of

the local 2007 participatory regulation and law. The Bildu government aimed to create a systemic participatory structure to overcome fragmented initiatives of participation through a city-wide participatory budgeting and a strategy that supplemented the accountability of representative government with state-sponsored innovations of participation. This strategy aimed at enhancing the social capital of civil society and encouraging a participatory culture where citizens were not only to be consulted about city development plans, but also could make decisions within the policy making process. Examples were *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, co-production of projects between local government and citizens and civil society associations were found to be closely aligned to the objectives and interests pursued by the local council. By the end of the Bildu administration, a city-wide participatory strategy was difficult to implement because of the atomised neighbourhood-association composition of SSD. This aspect may respond to historical differences between the central-urban and the peripheral-rural areas of the metropolitan zone.

In contrast to SDD, citizen participation in Cardiff has not been emblematic to the Labour Party, instead collaboration and partnership have been the preferred terms found in the 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 which have been part of the CF. These CF partnerships were built from grassroots groups and activists who depended on resources from the Welsh Government and local council to develop a whole 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 organisations has aimed to identify and overcome the most recurrent and difficult problems in the city. The model also manages the provision of local services city-wide (Pill and Guarneros-Meza, 2017). Although citizen participation is not a key element in the model, the council has considered it inclusive of citizens as civil society organisations and CF partnerships have become central in delivering services; especially since the council began to feel the impact of the financial crisis upon the city's budget. The local council has also promoted other participatory initiatives such as citizen panels, meetings and consultations, but which have been carried out in a fragmented way responding to specific policy needs regarding planning, policing, neighbourhood renewal and budget prioritisation.

Fieldwork in the two cities was carried out through semi-structured interviews (24 in SSD and 29 in Cardiff) over a multi-stage process between summer 2013 and spring 2016. We aimed to maintain a balance across the three types of actors interviewed: social activists, state and non-state officers involved in citizen participation and social service provision, and local politicians. The first stage comprised an exploratory

approach to the understanding of 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 in which same participants were interviewed for a second round. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Table 2. GDP, household and unemployment rates

	Spain	Basque Country	Donostia	Great Britain	Wales	Cardiff
GDP per capita (2010)	23.063 €	31.314 €	32.577 €			
GVA per capita (2012)				23,101 £	16,760 £	21,746 £ ¹
Household average income (2012)	25,094 €	42,729 €	49,539 €	31,720 £ ²	27,096 £ ²	29,692 £ ²
Unemployment rate (EPA 3/2013)	26,0%	15,8%	12,3%			
Unemployment rate (EAP 2013)				8.8%	7.9%	7.5%
Housing average rent (2012)	661 €/mth	944 €/mth	1.094 €/mth	¿?	¿?	¿?

Authors' own compilation from different sources. Spain: INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, EUSTAT (Instituto Vasco de Estadística) y EAPN (European Anti-Poverty Network). Great Britain: Office for National Statistics/Nomis and Welsh Government-Stats Wales. [1] Data include Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan. [2] Calculation from average gross weekly earning by place of residence

Discussion of findings

Because of the time of fieldwork, an analysis of the initial, *liminal* responses (transition from fiscal pre-austerity to post-austerity years) that city governments were carrying out and their impact upon citizen participation is discussed. Based on these two cities, this section underlines the interweaving between austerity urbanism factors (rollback redux, austerity governance, risk shifting and placebo dependency) and those characterising co-optative capacity: capture, technicalisation/professionalism, buffering conflict/negotiation and narratives of legitimisation.

(a) Preparing for rollback redux or flexing the muscles of 'capture'

Based on Peck's argument, the rollback redux is possible if the previous period of city governance was characterised by the rollout of state strategies which changed their role from 'rowing' to 'steering' in the provision of services. Like the rest of the UK, the pre-austerity period in Cardiff was characterised by partnership working between the state and local communities/TSOs. It was a period where models of roll-over funding by the state (national and local) to community groups and TSOs were very common to find. This created levels of financial dependency of TSOs upon the state, while the inculcation of co-responsibility to civil society was being developed. It was a process of 'making people more responsible'. A similar experience is observed in SSD, where partnership working between the public and third sectors before 2010 was highly promoted. This characteristic has not been unique to SSD,

but to the whole Gipuzkoa Province within the Basque Country (Arrieta Frutos and Etxezarreta Etxarri, 2012).

However, by the time the budget cuts reached Cardiff, the level of responsabilisation of civil society did not achieve 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]'.

Therefore, the start of the austerity period was characterised by a transition in the allocation of funds; from 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 to TSOs, which was feasible because of the city's existing governance model, the Cardiff Partnership.

Social activists were critical of this model, for example one of our interviewees stated:

Increasingly I think the [Welsh] State is most comfortable relating to organisations 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.

The 'mirroring' that this interviewee pointed out was acknowledged by council officers and a wide range of TSO officers, who happened to have worked in the city for a decade or more, some of them former members of grassroots groups. A similar experience was observed in SSD; this is boldly put by a municipal government officer 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.

In SSD the austerity narrative impacted the municipal government's practice through a re-centralisation of social 'assistentialism'. For example, municipal government declined financing social diners and instead it subsidised individuals with food vouchers. It also halted a concession of a youth community centre formerly ran by civil society associations. Re-centralisation was driven partly by the value of rights internalised by government officers, who believed that the 'Council has to guarantee social rights' of its residents. We observed that in the social services arena the SSD City Council was trying to find a balance between the pre-austerity partnership arrangements established with TSOs, while not letting pass any opportunity to recapture responsibility.

In both cities, preparing for the rollback redux also implied new organisational arrangements observed in ways community centres were run. Although the foundation of community hubs predated the impact of the budget cuts in Cardiff, it presaged these by helping to legitimise downloading and offloading tactics by making partnership/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 one single building. They offered advice, training and library/community services, and multi-agency teams from all these sectors were collaborating in the provision of community services. In SSD the *Casa de las Mujeres* provided a similar example; 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.

b) Technicalisation and professionalism as a means to ensure co-optative capacity

Peck's usage of 'austerity governance' can be unpicked by debates on the technicalisation of everyday practice, through rule-making and rule-monitoring required to manage and coordinate collaboration and partnership and which is invariably linked to co-optative capacity of local government. Preparing rollback redux allowed interdependence and organisational mimicry (Powell and DiMaggio, 1983) to be developed in both cities through an evolution from neighbourhood mobilisations and protest to their formalisation into neighbourhood associations or TSOs during the pre-austerity years. Through following specific processes in their organisation (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 down.

A municipal government officer in SSD explains this narrowing down through bureaucratisation:

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]...What is the result? If some people were committed to participate for the neighbourhood, now it is more difficult and it seems that we only put them barriers.

In Cardiff, deeper technicalisation 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 organisation 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, respected... We have that structure and then we can be creative, we can go off and be wild community workers.

In both cities, interviewees perceived bureaucratisation and its technicalisation as negative. In particular, project beneficiaries and activists accused these processes of 'turning community groups into the council'. However, in Cardiff TSO-CF officers also recognised the benefits of 'becoming more corporate, with more structure'. Their corporatisation helped them to become more professional and more confident in looking for funding beyond the council and Welsh Government.

The third sector are always very good at getting money from other sources. So it's made them a bit more resilient in some ways of going out to seek other sources of funding. The YMCA is a really good example of that. So we had a big community centre in one of our most deprived areas and the Council wanted to close it. So they're now signing the lease over to a third sector charity and they've gone for big European money to provide a community centre in that area (interview with council officer).

While our data in both cities confirmed the pre-austerity period helped TSOs and community groups to align their operative and monitoring processes into ways that mirrored the council practices (i.e. aligning objectives, preparing business cases, monitoring user feedback, running best practice and fundraising workshops), the Cardiff case showed to be more systematic than SSD. Through Cardiff's experience there are three points important to highlight, the first point was also evident in SSD.

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 to TSOs and community groups. With regard to older people 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.

Third, the budget cuts prompted the need for new procedural regulation to guide the operation and management of service commissioning to 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 responsibility of service provision that no longer the council, and other TSOs relying on government funding, were 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 that civil society had to be ready to comply with. However, Cardiff Council was not fully prepared for this and from 2015 the council started to work on it through the publication of the Stepping Up Toolkit (Cardiff Partnership, n/d). For some citizens, this type of guidelines was important to avoid a 'state of anarchy'; for councillors and government officers it was an invitation to chaos.

c) Risk shifting and the challenges of buffering conflict

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

In SSD, risk shifting across levels of government showed in some instances a contrary tendency, that of re-centralisation and upward shifting as a way of streamlining processes. For example, the management of basic income benefits were 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 assistential costs (i.e. food vouchers), which side-lined the work of some TSOs. The preference for a paternalistic approach did not stop SSD 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 costs, recruitment and redundancies were handled by the women association.

In contrast, Cardiff Council's reduced budget prompted the council to integrate CF partnership into the broader governance city model. This passed the management costs to TSOs (i.e. staff salaries) while the Welsh Government maintained the operative costs of the programme's activities. For the city council, this was a good deal as it did not only help to reduce its costs but also the liability of unemployment, which was passed down to TSOs. Although risk shifting deepened as a result of budget cuts, the city council was also working as a back-up. The council was ready to intervene and help out CF-TSOs through advice and support to ensure that the managerial and operative responsibilities they inherited from council complied with monitoring, audit and outcomes. 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 organisation [city council] but they have the support from a big organisation in the assistance of process and audits which are not their strong points...I think this is the way the council is going in the future about how we commissioned more and other people deliver, but we provide some quality assurance in management and the strategic stuff

TSOs in charge of managing and implementing CF envisaged their role as short term, especially because of reduction 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 took some risk off the city council's shoulders it was coupled with the challenges and threats to the council in buffering conflict. First, a sense of empowerment by local TSOs and community groups was identified during fieldwork. TSOs/ community groups that we 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 localised protests against closure of schools, libraries or community centres. These activities did not only raise awareness about the effects of budget cuts across the city, 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. This aimed to give people more time to inherit council services and learn how to run them through the Stepping Up guidelines.

Second, as the offloading process continued, the Cardiff Council did not only realise that in many cases communities did not know how to run community services, but also that they did not have the resources and time to do so. A local councillor commented:

I don't know how realistic it is to expect the communities to take over a library or community centre, or whatever, full-time. The reason I say that is you are relying on volunteers, volunteers have good intentions but things happen with volunteers because it's not a formal contract or they're not being paid...So you know, whilst yes there is the money to try and assist some of these organisations in transferring community assets or setting up a Trust or even a charity if they want to go down that road, I think that the timescale is worrying for the Council because the Council wants to save money quickly.

Other interviewees acknowledged Cardiff Council's efforts to approach citizens and explain the fiscal crisis that the council was facing and, as a result, had expressions of interests by community groups to take over services and assets. However, a more

careful consideration of what asset transfers involved discouraged participation. A politician, recalled a story of a lady 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 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 because it's about, you know, where's the money coming from to maintain these centres? The roof hasn't been repaired for a while.

The challenges mentioned revealed that the city council's traditional protocols of monitoring and complying with regulation had to become more flexible for empowerment and creativity of civil society to take place and fulfil the rollback redux. In this transition, two things began to indicate change; first new regulation had to find a balance between strict procedures followed by council/government agencies and partial procedures followed by community organisations who did not have enough administrative and managerial capacity to respond to all regulation and legislation required. Second, acknowledging 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 that the council used to cover.

The implications of these challenges revealed the vulnerability of Cardiff Council vis-à-vis a civil society, which perceived itself as empowered, in two respects; 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 for buffering conflict, needed for co-optative capacity, began to show signs of cracks. This situation was not necessarily experienced by SSD, as untouched fiscal resources accompanied by a broader discourse of austerity prompted different tiers of government to restate, whenever possible, their protagonist role through centralised responsibility.

d. Placebo dependency, new spaces of negotiation and legitimation

Peck underlines that placebo dependency is the gap between the capacity to act and the imperative to be seen as acting locally. This gap is useful to understand local government's legitimacy while combining different narratives to justify austerity.

In Cardiff the 'need-to-be-seen-as-acting' was observed through 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 the first year of events, which coincided with the last visit to fieldwork, people were asked which services matter the most, while asking them to put forward ideas on how the council could do things differently to save money in the future. This initiative was not exhaustive, but aimed

to be innovative as it was the first time that the council organised a city-wide consultation on the future of local public services.

The Cardiff Debate helped to legitimise the role of the city council. It began to be crucial after some activist groups questioned the council's role in responding to the budget cuts and when it stopped transferring grants to TSOs and community groups. Cardiff Council, of all state agencies participating in the Cardiff Partnership, had 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 attested, 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.

Unlike Cardiff, there was no imperative for the SSD Council to be seen as acting locally; but despite its unchanged budget, the council wanted 'to be seen as acting'. As a result, it created a protectionist narrative against austerity that built upon the city's participatory system. Given the impact that austerity had upon higher levels of government, the council did not have resources to invest in public infrastructure (i.e. river cleansing), but it sought ways to be 'seen as acting' through tactics of participatory planning that didn't require expense. Through projects such as *Auzolan* and *Auzo Elkartearen Bilgunea*, the Bildu administration sought to legitimise 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 marginalised. 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. What was interesting to find was how local government officers perceived that the relationship with these neighbourhood associations was beginning to change as a result of austerity. An officer explains:

What I see is a social fabric, building always a relation with the [municipal] administration, conscientious of the 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...and in [the current] relationship I have seen more common sense, understanding that the crisis conditions the solutions that can emerge.

Cardiff Council also capitalised on its past given its history of being a 'good council'. The opinion of a social movement member is helpful in summarising 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 consultation

going on, a lot connected with the workforce and people getting redeployed or reduced hours [offloading]. 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.

Local councillors and officers saw a need to rely on its 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. Particularly interesting was the rediscovery of the value of local councillors by local government officers. The processes of downloading and offloading were accompanied by dismay, fear and frustration of citizens experiencing cuts to community services. Councillors (and to a lesser extent Assembly Members) became a valuable means to refer citizens and community groups to up-skilling and training sessions. Indeed, the close relationship that some councillors had with their constituencies was an asset that Cardiff Partnership began to realise was important to cope with the challenges of austerity. Councillors were soon conceived to play an important role in buffering the conflictual emotions that cuts to services wrought. A similar role, 'community ambassador' in community groups was created by TSOs working in CF. These ambassadors encouraged people to participate and to start co-producing services, becoming another means to legitimise offloading.

Discussion and conclusions

Comparing Cardiff and SSD has helped to unpick Peck's four factors considered relevant in understanding co-optative capacity in contexts of austerity. The findings show that the two cities were preparing for a rollback redux (downloading and offloading) and this preparation entailed deepening technicalisation through operative and monitoring processes that mimicked or narrowed the gap between local government and TSOs/community groups.

The findings showed that risk shifting- comprised by a double movement: downwards (from national to subnational levels) and beyond the state (offloading)- was non-linear for SSD. This case showed a re-centralisation of certain assistential initiatives by municipal government and of basic income support by national government. This responds in great part to the uneven decentralisation of welfare in Spain which has followed a paternalist-like approach in the Basque Country. The Welsh case, through the CF programme and Cardiff Partnership, showed that the downloading-offloading has been more linear and more attuned to the theoretical proposition stated by Peck.

Placebo dependency was present in both cities; however, in Cardiff it was directly associated to the need of being seen responding to the unexpected and immediacy of public expenditure cuts. Citizen participation and voluntarism in service provision fit into narratives of austerity resignation while holding on to the historical reputation of a caring and collaborative council. The need of the SSD Council to be-seen-as-acting-locally was not time imperative, but the broader discourse of Spanish austerity

led the council to develop a narrative of protectionism that capitalised on the city's participatory system, which in turn revitalised ideals of Basque communitarianism.

Through these four austerity co-optative factors, we conclude that the combination of the fiscal resignation and partnership/co-production narratives in Cardiff helped to maintain the legitimacy of the council during the immediate years of fiscal austerity, albeit its co-optative capacity being weakened. 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 organise consultation that opened spaces of negotiation with citizens and civil society showed a weakened capacity to co-opt. However, the council simultaneously relied on a combination of new and quick responses that capitalised from previous efforts (trust, mimetism, and the city governance model) to keep afloat its legitimacy and affront an uncertain future.

Meanwhile the SSD Council, showed a stronger capacity to co-opt because it continued funding TSOs while centralising local social subsidies/assistance. The negative impact that public infrastructural investment had at higher levels of government, prompted the council to create new spaces of citizen participation (i.e. Auzolan) as a way of legitimation. In these spaces negotiation of neighbourhood associations was low 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 professionalised regulation (i.e. business plans, outcome and monitoring reports). The accentuated technicalisation of TSOs, while being immersed in a broader discourse of austerity, was the council's preparation strategy for, an unknown but potential, future rollback redux.

In comparing these two cities, it can be said that Cardiff found itself in a more advanced phase than SSD in terms of austerity urbanism. This point can be argued given the similarities, albeit different historical contexts, between the two cities. The delayed effects of the financial crisis on local government spending was an opportunity for both councils to capitalise on their legacies of institutional protectionism. The lack of social protest and contestation, reflected through the historical trends of regional and local governments funding TSOs and community groups, also showed the cities' paternalistic governance. However, the different devolution or decentralising policies and structures in the UK and Spain marked the difference between the cities and therefore a temporal divergence in which austerity urbanism was experienced. The city comparison also underlined that although the fiscal dimension is important in understanding how co-optative capacity fares under austerity, it is not the only factor to bear in mind. The SSD case, where local public expenditure was practically unchanged, showed that the broader discourse of austerity experienced in Spain across different regions and across tiers of government (the higher up the more exposed to the effects of expenditure cuts (Martí-Costa and Navarro, 2015: 370) infiltrated the council's system of participation.

Our study may contribute to other broader discussions on urban austerity. We find that it speaks to the 'boundaries' and 'politics' elements of the urban crisis framing suggested by Bayirbag et al.'s (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 two cities, our analysis offers an interpretation on the way this 'liminality' fares across space and time. The preparation of the rollback redux to capture voluntarism and participation, followed by technicalisation provide analytical tools to unpick liminality in local social provision under austerity. This is further complemented by the direction that risk shifting takes through procedural rules and narratives that help identify the 'politics' of austerity (2017:7): how it is portrayed and who is to blame to start thinking of alternatives.

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