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GOVERNING SPANISH MUNICIPALITIES THROUGH MOBILITIES

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Abstract

Measures to encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport rather than the car both exemplify and reveal the change in local policy in Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia since 2015. The article explores the resources employed by politicians to re-politicise mobility by removing it from the purely technical sphere of transport management. This field of action is constructed around politicians whose positions and media strategies vary substantially. Without denying the limitations (fetishisation of the bicycle and focus on a handful of flagship urban operations), the article describes the discontinuities but also the continuities with the programmes of previous municipalities. It also highlights how mobility planning, through the reorganisation of public space, expresses the intentions and expectations associated with political change (behaviour modification, respect, public spirit). This new form of governance through infrastructure also leads to a profound reshaping of local relations between public and private actors, community movements working for new mobilities, and interest groups that remain largely wedded to the automobile.

Key words : mobility policy, public space, bike policy, Spain

Résumé

Les mesures pour favoriser la marche, la pratique du vélo et l'usage des transports publics au détriment de l'automobile constituent à la fois un vecteur et un révélateur du changement politique local à Madrid, Barcelone et Valence depuis 2015. L'article explore les ressources

mobilisées par les élus pour repolitiser la mobilité en la sortant de la sphère technique de la gestion des déplacements. Ce champ d'action se construit autour d'élus dont la posture et les stratégies médiatiques varient fortement. Sans nier les limites (fétichisation du vélo et focalisation sur quelques opérations urbanistiques phares) de es pratiques politiques, l'article montre les ruptures mais aussi les effets de continuité avec les programmes des municipalités précédentes. L'étude souligne également que la planification des mobilités, à travers le réordonnancement de l'espace public, illustre et prétend faire advenir le changement politique attendu (pacification des comportements, respect, civisme). Cette forme renouvelée de gouvernance par l'infrastructure induit également des reconfigurations relationnelles profondes dans le système local de la mobilité, entre acteurs publics et privés, mais aussi entre mouvements associatifs en faveur des mobilités nouvelles et groupes d'intérêts encore majoritairement attachés à l'automobile.

Mots clés : politique de mobilité, espace public, politique en faveur du vélo, Espagne

Introduction

The issue of mobilities in Spain's big cities is a subject of stormy political debate (González & Pazos 2015). In some cases, such as Pontevedra, Vitoria or San Sebastian, this dynamic is the expression long-standing local commitment. However, since 2015, the municipalities of change have made this agenda one of their flagship objectives. The moderation of automobile traffic, the transformation of the street network with protected corridors, the pursuit of better transport regulation, the organisation of educational and fun events around urban walking and cycling are some of the most popular measures they pursue, despite great significant differences in their mobility patterns. The municipal agendas move gradually away from a specifically legal or technical framework into the central arenas of political local action.

This article does not make a point by point comparison, nor does it attempt to evaluate the performance of the different measures. Instead, it explores how political change is effected through mobilities, and how this agenda is both a symbol and driver of change in Spain's three biggest cities. The first, theoretical section situates this process at the interface between sociotechnical transition in transport and urban governmentality. The second section analyses the new mobility rules and discusses to what extent they represent disruption or continuity by comparison with previous municipal action. This part shows that the current policy is less disruptive than the media claim, and rather an extension and intensification of orientations decided by the previous municipalities, even if the argumentation adopted differ a lot. In the climate of current polarisation on issues of mobility, the article highlights the limitations and ambiguities of the three municipal experiments and reveals the political and electoral resources mobilized by new elected officials.

1. Political change and sociotechnical revolutions: what overlaps?

In Spain, there is at least a historical synchrony between the changes in the mobility system and the apparition of new leftist municipalities. Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia municipal teams are enthusiastically embracing the agenda of innovation in urban mobilities. Why? Our argument is that they are using changes in mobility to make more tangible and visible what they call change.

11. Mobilities, a prerogative claimed by urban governments

On the evening of 24 May 2015, the victory of the three political formations *Ahora Madrid, Barcelona en Comù* and *Compromís* in Valencia shook the foundations of urban governance in Spain. It confirmed the political repolarisation of Southern Europe's cities (Leontidou 2010). The advent of teams rooted in civic platforms reshaped the political space (Seixas

2015). A new stage of municipalism began (Martí-Costa and Tomàs 2017), after the municipalist era of post-Franco Transition, and the entrepreneurial moment of the 1990s (Genieys *et al*. 2004). Blanco (2015) has shown the dual nature of this political turn. First, it depends on the building of coalitions (political understandings between parties extended to other political, economic and societal entities and interests). Second, it emphasizes on the «commons», i.e. questions that affect the day-to-day lives of citizens, such as housing or mobility. Local policies relating to mobilities have brought about a threefold change in political life: in the nature and forms of political leadership, in the transformation of the modes of action on public space, and in relational systems present in each of the cities. An example of this development is the shifting role of private partners in the funding, regulation and management of licence contracts for self-service bicycle schemes (Huré 2017). In Madrid, for instance, the remunicipalisation of the Bicimad contract in 2016 showed that the multinational firm JC Decaux, one of the global leaders for this type of contract, was no longer a central player.

The media hype around the idea of a local transport revolution in these cities. But specialists underline the lack of capacity for action of Spanish municipal governments, which they attribute to several factors, notably the structural indebtedness and imbalances of local authorities (González Pérez *et al.*, 2016) and the asymmetry of municipal power in the distribution of prerogatives in Spain's institutional framework. In fact, in the field of transport, most of the levers are in the hands of the state (which funds big infrastructures, such as motorways and high-speed rail)(González 2016). Moreover, the state has set strategic goals for sustainable urban mobility (a first generation of planning documents such as *Estrategia española de la movilidad sostenible* was launched by the Zapatero government) (Vega 2016). In addition, the autonomous communities are increasingly involved in this sphere (De Gregorio, 2014). Catalonia Generalitat was a pioneer, with the introduction of a mobility act as early as 2003 that provided the basis for urban mobility planning at regional, metropolitan and local scale (Cascajo *et al*. 2018). Nonetheless, the municipal level is now more heavily involved in this field of political action, although the economic crisis exacerbated urban vulnerabilities. Making local territories more resilient not just to future economic crises, but also to ecological risks is a crucial priority, making local governance of mobility even more fundamental (Marquet & Miralles 2017).

12. The sociotechnical transition in transport and mobilities

Mobilities also stand at the heart of sociotechnical transformation, often referred to as *transition*. According to Geels, radical innovations appear and develop in *niches* where they

gain the support of a small minority. Then the innovation spreads and becomes the framework of an *innovation regime.* It is then adopted within a local context and follows a *reconfiguration pathway*.[1] Subsequently, the innovation is consolidated within an *innovation landscape*, i.e. a framework in which it is widely accepted and shared, and around which the rest of the economic and political system is restructured (Geels 2012).

Although simplistic, this model can be used for the current transition from automobility to a more diverse mobility system. Automobility refers to a system in which the car is not necessarily the dominant mode of transport, but the one granted by political and economic decisions (Urry 2004). In Spain, this model can adapt to the bicycle, which is gradually loosing its marginal status (Muñoz et al. 2016). The mobility transition therefore consists in reorienting urban regimes through normative tools, while at the same time transforming mobility practices and broader lifestyles by educational and cultural means. Insofar as the emphasis is placed on collective learning and on the commons, the sociotechnical transition in transport and the shift in the governance of mobilities towards a transformation in practices seem not only compatible but even mutually reinforcing.

At the interface between the sociotechnical sphere and politics, therefore, the mobility transition is mainly governed at local level. Docherty introduces the notion of purposive governance in reference to the process whereby elected officials avoid direct ideological confrontation and redefine the negotiating framework by building shared visions, ideas and values[2] (Docherty *et al.* 2018). He explains how officials avoid the «demonisation» of motorists by stating the end goals of these policies (e.g. the right to breathe clean air) and by emphasising the rights opened up to all citizens from a perspective of democratic restoration (e.g. the possibility for even the most vulnerable people – such as the elderly – to move safely in public space).

Another useful concept is *infrastructural governance.* It refers to the way in which local governments use infrastructures and service networks for the joint purpose of frugality in both energy use and finance (Haarstad 2016, Wegrich et al. 2017). Recent Spanish history is a good illustration of this shift. The previous municipalities used infrastructures to support the

[1] "Reconfiguration pathway is the fourth step and concerns symbiotic innovations, which developed in niches, are initially adopted in the regime to solve local problems. They subsequently trigger further adjustments in the basic architecture of the regime." p 411.

[2] «The role of governance in addressing profound socio-technical transitions is to be "purposive", that is to develop a set of normative goals for the wider outcomes of the transition that the resources of the governing organisations will be deployed to secure. The call for a 'purposive' approach talks directly to work from political science on changing forms of governance which has sought to conceptualise and examine the notion of 'public value'.» p 3.

growth machine. In Madrid especially, radial motorways were built in order to support real estate development in the outskirts. The current municipalities use infrastructures as a way to save money and provide a public service.

2. Mobility as an activator of local action

21. Who are the new mobilities local leader ?

Table 1 was produced from a body of 446 press articles in *El País* (Madrid and Catalonia editions), 78 articles in *Las Provincias* and in *Levante* newspapers (to provide better coverage of Valencia), and 117 articles in *La Vanguardia* (focusing on decisions taken in Barcelona). All these articles were published between the end of May 2015 and August 2018. This coverage of more than three and a half years of municipal life elucidated three important factors.

(Please insert Table 1 : it is at the end of this document, after references)

First, the position occupied by the elected municipal official responsible for mobility in his or her team can vary in importance, and the responsibilities are not strictly limited to mobility. In Madrid, the portfolio is Environment and Mobility, and the deputy is a former representative of Izquierda Unida, at the eighth rank in Manuela Carmena's team. In Barcelona, mobility is assigned to the fourth deputy in the list, belonging to the green party, ant the portfolio is dedicated to Ecology and Urban Planning.[3] In Valencia, the sustainable mobility and public space responsibility falls to the sixth deputy in the municipal list, also a Equo Verde member. Two women (in Madrid and Barcelona) and one man (in Valencia), two younger people (respectively in their 30s and 40s in Barcelona and Valencia) compared with an more mature political figure in Madrid. These profiles show that a long political experience is not necessarily required and that mobilities in itself rarely stand alone in local political allocations.

Second, an examination of the way in which these officials exercise their responsibilities reveals much diversity, both in the modes of political engagement and in the repertoires of action. In Madrid, the aforementioned councillor is involved in a whole series of projects relating to traffic, mobilities and the development of public space. There is a similar arrangement in Barcelona, where the young delegate often receives direct support from the Mayor, Ada Colau, in the most sensitive issues. For example, the tramline project on Avenue

[3] There is also a vice-president responsible for mobilities in Barcelona Metropolitan Authority.

Diagonal, or the bylaw to regulate the use of scooters on foot pavements in the most touristic areas... The first of these issues had already prompted the resignation of one elected official in a previous municipality and merits special attention.[4] The second relates to the equally sensitive question of excessive tourist volumes and is a bone of contention within the municipal coalition itself and with interest groups in the hotel and real estate sectors.

In Valencia, the scenario is different (López García 2015). While remaining entirely loyal to the mayor, the Valencian deputy remains in sole charge of his fiefdom. He is the undisputed boss in all his fields of responsibility, whether as manager of the local bus company, or as the orchestrator of road sharing and management policies. This official has built a charismatic image, occupying both the geographical space (he can be seen daily roaming the city, usually on a bicycle) and the media sphere (he has almost 10,000 followers on Twitter, as compared with a third of that for his counterpart in Madrid and a sixth for his Barcelona colleague). In person, this politician espouses the contemporary ethic of the political manager with «skin in the game» (Taleb N. 2018), in other words he personally models the changes in mobility behaviour that he would like to see. This profile resembles the character of the *passeur* (broker) or, better, to the *fixer* introduced more recently by Zrinka Stahuljak. Fixer refers to a person who guides other individuals into difficult theatres of operation, and uses his knowledge to help them move around on unfamiliar ground (Stahuljak, 2012). This describes the stance of a Valencian politician who is explicitly avant-garde in his behaviour (no more than 2 to 3% of his fellow citizens cycle in the city). His goal is to convert motorists to green modes by imitation and emulation, a role he overplays to the point of making himself vulnerable to criticism (Milani Medeiros & Duarte, 2013).

22. Reclaming public space

The greening of municipal agendas advances through mobility. The central priority for the municipalities of change is a simultaneous reform of public space and travel practices (Boix & Marzal, 2015). Yet, their political priorities differ. Madrid focuses primarily on limiting air pollution, Barcelona on fluid traffic movement, and Valencia on the reclamation and pacification of public space. The chief symbols of this agenda are the metamorphoses of a handful of iconic urban locations. Between 2015 and 2019, such big projects include the expansion of the pedestrianised areas on the Gran Via in Madrid; the concealment of automobile flows under Gloriès Square in Barcelona; the redevelopment of City Hall Square in Valencia. Moreover, all these municipalities have a «totem», in other words an object that

[4] Carles Martí, first deputy to Mayor Jordi Hereu resigned following the failure of the referendum on the redesign of Avenue Diagonal in May 2010

is simultaneously elevated to the status of a symbol of change and of a miracle solution. The Barcelona totem could have been the tramway, but, as will be explained later, the political opportunity has been lost. Consequently the bicycle has become the symbol, or the *rolling signifier* (Hoffmann 2016) of the change these three municipalities promote. Bike is not only as a virtuous mode of travel, it is also the instrument for the transformation of public space, as well as a medium of positivity and affect (Castillo 2013). Yet, in all three cities, governance entails arguments that, as shown below (Table 2), bring into play the social, economic and environmental dimensions alike[5].

Table 2. The municipal arguments in favour of the new mobilities

1 - Maintaining health and combating obesity
2 - Protecting the environment and reducing the frequency and intensity of air pollution spikes
3 - Making public space safer and reducing accidents
4 - Not damaging the road system and therefore saving on maintenance and construction
5 - Enhancing the quality of public space
6 - Recapturing public space as social space
7 - Making mobilities a medium for economic growth and innovation

Inevitably, this agenda attracts heavy criticism from all sides. The right-wing opposition quickly took up the cudgels on behalf of motorists affected by the restriction on access to the city centre and the reduction in parking spaces. As observed in other cities, the totemisation of the bicycle has also produced a political front or a «bikelash» (Wild 2018 *et al*). Residents rejects the new paradigm of mobilities. In Madrid, for example, residents of Calle de Galileo accuse the politicians of being blind to the real world consequences of the street conversion programmes. They see the too little-used cycle lane built along this road as useless, while the reduction in the width of the roadway available for cars exacerbates congestion and pollution.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of sensitivities, the radical left social movements that had been fighting for mobility issues to be included on the agenda since the early 2000s, via multiple demonstrations and street parties (*bicifestaciones held each thursday in Madrid*), are expressing some disillusion and negotiating their support for the existing municipalities. These civil society movements have ramped up the pressure through their favourite instrument, social media (López León 2016). They question the relations between the new municipalities and the international mobility players. They note that, except in Madrid, the licensing contracts for self-service bicycle schemes stay out of municipal control. Some radical elements target the Chinese companies that are flooding the pavements with free-floating bikes and boards[6].

23. Mobility policy : continuity or change ?

[6] For example, Aran, a left-wing republican youth organisation, condemns the invasion of public space (and by tourists, and by the methods of transport they use), and includes all types of vehicles in its demands and actions. It broadcasts videos of acts of sabotage on self-service bicycles. It also uses parked cars to spread its messages (in the summer of 2017, it placed stickers on cars to condemn capitalist organisations like AirBnB and their effects on the housing crisis). It also attacked a tourist bus.

There is no doubt that mobilities have been significantly re-politicised, after a pre-crisis period (1990s -2000s) marked by two characteristics : the marginalisation of this field of political action (with the dominance of a highly technical approach) and the capture of road infrastructure programmes by a speculative growth machine. Anyway, the ecological conversion of transport is a long process that began in the 1990s (Estevan & Sanz, 1996) The measures implemented by the municipalities of change are in continuity with earlier mobility policies. Their content was already identifiable in the programmes of the previous municipalities and had begun to be implemented.

In Madrid, Alberto Ruiz-Gallardón (mayor from 2003 to 2011) was very committed to a form of infrastructure-based urban government (he conducted the works of the M30 motorway). Ana Botella (mayor from 2011 to 2015) didn't develop a great infrastructure project but reorganized the municipal administration and merged the environment and mobility into a single department, notably to tackle the problem of pollution spikes on which the European Union regularly called for local action.

In Barcelona, the local authorities had been pursuing a municipal (and metropolitan) mobility policy for longer than the other cities. This effort reflected, among other things, in the insistence of the urban players on producing an exportable «Barcelona model» founded on the quality of public space (Tomás & Négrier, 2018). Until the mid-2000s, the distribution of the portfolios and the organisation of the municipality was compartmentalised: on one side the governance of infrastructures and public space, with one elected official in charge, on the other the management of transport and traffic accident prevention, headed by another official. However, things changed faster than in Madrid or Valencia, following the launch of a «Mobility pact». Mobility rose to the top of the agenda under Jordi Hereu who, before becoming mayor, had been the safety and mobility officer in the previous municipality. The official he appointed to deal with mobilities was Joaquim Forn, who symbolically held the functions of first deputy and spokesman of the municipal team. At that time, all the big programmes backed by the current municipality of Ada Colau were already in play: the competition on Plaça de les Glories started in 2013, and the projects of slowing down and «civilising» the avenues leading into the city centre (e.g. Avenida Meridiana) at the same period.

In Valencia too, the image of a mobility revolution hawked by the media needs to be qualified in favour of forms of continuity. Rita Barbera’s two decades as mayor masks a gradual maturing of the paradigms of mobility transition in local action. This can be tracked through

the career of one of her right-hand men in the different municipal teams and through different key programmes. That man was Alfonso Novo Belenguer, who from 2003 to 2007 held the «Traffic, Transport and Infrastructure» portfolio. At that time, his position in the hierarchy of councillors was still obscure. In the next municipal team, 2007-2012, Belenguer obtained the position of deputy mayor with a growing list of portfolios (*Circulación, Transportes e Infraestructuras del Transporte, Patrimonio y Gestión Patrimonial*). Helped by a *Concejal Delegado de Circulación y Transportes*, he launched a plan for a city centre cycle network and clearly expressed the wish to limit the presence of cars in order to increase fluidity of travel.

3. Mobility, political resource or electoral trap?

Ultimately, the local political battle is being fought less around the content of the mobility measures than around the political properties associated with it by officials in the municipalities of change. We shall present successively mobility as a narrative resource again Popular Party's, mobility as a way to make change materially visible to citizens in public space and mobility as a vehicle for citizen participation.

31. Mobility policy and public life morality

A policy narrative is a set of stories that place the present within a coherent series of events. Narratives make problems comprehensible and accessible to action. The city of Valencia has been considerably touched by the recent economic crisis and by the Popular Party (PP) corruption scandals. In this context, mobility policy narrative is used as an instrument of local political moralisation (Kennedy 2016). First, the pacification of car traffic and the support given to cyclists and pedestrians alter the balance in the conditions of access to public space. Improvement to the urban model is understood as the advent of a system that offers users a more egalitarian share in collective movement. With the decrease of speed, citizens care one another and treat each other with greater respect. This model therefore constitutes the foundation of a change in the relations between city dwellers, and therefore between citizens. The moralization of public life becomes a reality because it is applied directly to day-to-day acts. In this way, the crusade for a renewed urban mobility regime regenerates public mores, re-moulds local democracy, conjures the populist threat.

The substance of the confrontations between municipal majority and opposition therefore resides not so much in the measures implemented than in the ends pursued in this disruptive

agenda. For the majorities, the bicycle is not only presented as a mode of transport, but as an instrument of civilisation. (This operates in other countries such as Australia, see Cooper & Leahy 2017). Bike dissemination through the city is perceived as helping to slow down cars. It is supposed as a lever to redefine the acceptability of behaviours on the public highway. Therefore, bike is presented as the key to a collective coexistence founded on tolerance, exemplary personal conduct, respect for others. This shocks the rightist local opposition, which condemns the ideological dimension of this mobility policy. What is seen by the municipal majority as an extension of freedom is perceived by the PP and Ciudadanos Party as undermining freedom of movement of car owners. PP municipal elected also criticise the hegemonic dimension of this approach to mobilities.

32. Mobility, a way to materialize change and regain city pride

Local action is incremental. Traffic problems cannot be solved in one go, the modal share of pedestrians and cyclists increases slowly. Mobility policy supports the small steps discourse and the idea of a permanent progress. Mobility decisions, such as bike lanes construction along Madrid, Valencia or Barcelona avenues are useful with regard to the opposition and citizens, but also within these coalitions themselves, where impatience and internal criticism are on the rise. The officials try to show, *in situ*, project after project, a process of continuous improvement. Widening the pavements, doubling cycle lanes programmes, limiting the expansion of restaurant terraces that inconvenience pedestrians, or limiting parking, all provide a concrete and material embodiment of the abstract idea of change, and make it possible to maintain this claim as a leitmotiv throughout the whole term of office. Following the initiatory breakthrough of 2015, the necessarily evolving and processual nature of urban planning has been reformulated as a logic of progressive, tenacious and continuing realisation of the ultimate (i.e. democratic and ethical) goals of these municipalities of change.

Finally, mobility policies enable politicians to marshal identity as a political resource. Subjects such as the frequency of pollution spikes or the very small modal shares held by active mobilities (walking and cycling) show the backwardness of Spain’s cities in the rankings of sustainable cities at European or international level. Reversing this trend is a way for these cities to gild their image. For example, by announcing that it is starting its cycle lane project «before Madrid», Valencia municipality can emphasise the idea of catching up, or even of repairing the city’s collective honour after a decade of negative publicity wrought by the scandals of its body politic in the 2000s (Cucó, 2013). The slogan whereby Valencia

claims the status of a Mediterranean model of «nice cities« (*Valencia Ciutat amable*[7]) is also an instrument for the reinforcement, not to say the reconstruction, of identity.

33. Mobilities and the municipal "fetish" of participation

The programmes relating to mobilities are also a way for officials to bring local democracy to life, partly by holding consultations, and partly by creating communities around highly localised projects for the development of public space (Lorenzi & Acero, 2016). In this sense, the agenda offers support for the construction of a common good through participation, what Diaz terms the new political "fetish" (Díaz Parra *et al*. 2017).

Mobility issues give politicians an opportunity to interact with citizens and to renew democratic processes of local governance. In Madrid, this is illustrated through consultation initiatives. On 19 February 2017, 2.7 million Madrid residents aged 16 and above were invited to vote on several reforms, including reforms relating to foot travel and cycling and restrictions on automobile traffic (*area residencial*). While this consultation attracted little interest, the invitation to vote for the best project for the Plaza de España was more successful. Barcelona municipality does not ask citizens to vote on mobility issues, since this issue falls mainly within the purview of the metropolitan authority, and is therefore largely beyond the reach of citizen involvement. Valencia has found a different way to democratise mobility issues through the *mesa de movilidad*. In this arena, the controversial regulations on restaurant terraces(or the negociations with taxi and Uber representants) have led to a turbulent reformulation of the links between mobility, access to public space and the broader question of the commons. The Valencian councillor charged with the mobility portfolio has proposed some decisions that show his commitment with societal questions. He has introduced preferential pricing for young people, the elderly and the vulnerable in Valencia's bus system. He has developed gender measures through the recruitment of female bus drivers. He connects mobility targets with participative events, equitative social programmes and anti-austerity measures. By recapitalising the municipal transport company, he pretends having protected a component of local public service after years of austerity. None of this has shielded him from widespread criticism.

4. Mobility projects limited outcomes : lack of resources or lack of ambition?

Two main sets of critiques have emerged with respect to the current political moment. One is that there is a major defect in the institutional construction of this public policy. This defect is

[7] www.valenciaciutatamable.org

that urban mobility operates not only at urban but at metropolitan scales, since the travel catchments (linking households in peripheral areas to jobs in the centre) are themselves multi-municipal. The municipalities cannot really move forward on their own, whether in planning or in infrastructure development. Barcelona is the only spanish big city with a multi-municipal body. But Barcelona Metropolitan Region has conducted multiple studies, but has done relatively little in terms of concrete action on the ground. In Madrid, the autonomous community headed by the Popular's Party is preparing to sue Madrid Central, the operation that restricts car access to the centre, and is working with Ciudadanos to oppose the policy in defence of the rights of motorists in the residential suburbs. The absence of transport authorities covering the metropolitan areas of both Madrid and Valencia makes it difficult to draw up effective mobility plans (though it should be noted that a metropolitan mobility plan for Valencia, the PMOME, is currently in preparation under the responsibility of Valencia Regional government, which is also in charge of Metro and regional railway network). As for the advent of a multilevel governance of mobilities, which would coordinate strategies, budgets and actions at the local, community and central government levels, it is very largely lacking. In consequence, the municipalities of change are reduced to working bilaterally with a few municipalities that are both neighbours and political friends in order to extend bus and cycle lanes towards the outskirts, in the attempt to ultimately restrict the movement of cars into the centre.

Another major limitation of municipal action lies in the inertia of urban form. Spain's monumental avenues were designed in the 19th century and were later developed in the Franco era and during the Transition into car-centred boulevards (Castellana Avenue in Madrid, for example, is 6.3 km long and more than 80 meters wide). Although the current municipalities are trying to slow things down with traffic lights, even, in some cases, replacing footbridges with pedestrian crossings, infrastructure constitutes a major complication. Municipalities that want to achieve quick results and hope to be seen as smart city models (Béal & Pinson 2014) have to negotiate processes that take a long time. The three cities thus have a long way to go before they join the ranks of some of the national benchmarks for progress in mobilities (Pontevedra or San Sebastian). Nonetheless, the mayor of Valencia and his mobility chief are trying to put their city on the map and aspire to become models of sustainable urban mobility. Here continuity is another time visible in the way emphasis on urban infrastructure planning is associated with Valencia image. Previous PP mayor changed Valencia public space and sustained «white elephants» (such as City of Arts and Harbours Congress center) and mega events (such as America's Cup and Formula 1) to attract investors (Pryterch D. 2003). Bike lane construction is another kind of infrastructural project, but still infrastructure, and if the banner has changed, infrastructure governance serves the same political goals of city branding and international image (López García 2015).

The second line of criticism comes from within the critical studies movement and questions local politicians' somewhat naive fascination with mobilities. The arguments employed in the Spanish context can be summarised and situated as follows. First, the arrival of the new political teams in 2015 had a great deal to do with the issue of public space and with its reconfiguration as political space following the occupation of Puerta del Sol on 15 May 2011 (Baron 2013). However, the policies of the new municipalities are now perceived as broadly convergent with sociotechnical transition and not greatly critical of the economic interests that are controlling and steering it in a neoliberal direction, generating asymmetric power relations and inequalities (Temenos et al. 2017).[8] Some arguments against now mobility paradigm has recently been transposed from the US to the Spanish context. Stehlin (2015), Hoffman (2016), Osborne & Grant-Smith (2017) show that the opportunities afforded by the municipal action plans are often very poorly distributed both socially and spatially. They show that restrictions on car traffic and the construction of cycle lanes are addressed more to a fairly well-off urban population, resident in the city centre, than to peripherial areas (Hoffman M 2016). This leads to a socio - spatial mismatch. The social mismatch is due to the fact that municipalities, consciously or not, favour certain categories of cyclists epitomised by the highly visible MAMIL (middle-aged man in lycra)[9], rather than the cyclist who cannot afford any other means of transport (Osborne & Grant-Smith, 2017). This appears to be true of the situation in Spain. In Madrid, Inès Sabanès is facing criticism from the *Comisiones obreras*, which take the view that closing the city centre to vehicles is not a socially progressive policy, in that it accentuates gentrification. The spatial mismatch is present because the mobility projects held by municipalities of change transform mainly centric places. These projects don't affect public space in districts where the local leaders find the majority of the electors.

Ultimately, the attempt to make positive and progressive decisions over local mobility is failing to make a clean break with the context of neoliberalism. Writing in Italy, Pollio views the new mobilities as a dimension of austerity urbanism (Pollio 2016). Spinney observes that local government is not just a benevolent supporter of mobility, but *governs by mobility* in that it transfers a whole set of responsibilities to the individual, such as the responsibility for remaining healthy and therefore productive in work (Spinney 2016).[10] The *fixer* is therefore no longer just the councillor who is importing Northern European mobility standards into

[8] «The very meaning of mobility is inherently political and requires engagement with wider debates on the politics of transitions [...] Transition policies are truly transformative [...] but a critique of socio technical transition theories includes downplaying ideology, power and justice in favour of technologically determined innovations» (p 1).

[9] «Cycling policy is complicit in constructing the cycling citizen, i e the normative cyclist at whom cycling policy and infrastructure provision is directed» p 45.

[10] «Crucially, this is city government action not only on mobility through a set of desired outcomes but government through mobility», Spinney p. 454)

Spanish cities with the moto *Copenhagenize*, but also the citizen who, by reforming his day-to-day behaviour, reinforces the dominant system and thus embeds the new face of capitalism. Nonetheless, the accuracy of this interpretation is questionable. For example, the city of Valencia is keen to include many different types of cyclists (women, children...) and does not seem to be targeting public investment at the middle-class urban cyclist as London does. And in Barcelona, mobility needs are tackled from multiple perspectives and from a wider conceptualisation of citizen rights (Di Ciommo, 2017).

Conclusion

In the last twenty years, urban policies have been a laboratory for the reorganisation of local public action. This article has sought to show that they are also one of the essential programmes pursued by the urban governments of Spain's big cities because they activate and transform the ways in which local action is expressed and produced.

Mobility is one of the spheres of public action that can be tackled in a strictly limited way or, on the opposite, as a means of transforming the conditions under which local political action is undertaken in a profound and lasting way. In the case of the three cities studied in this paper, admittedly at varying levels and in varying forms, we have shown that the municipalities of change have tended to pursue the second approach. This transformative ambition has prompted the different interest groups to reshape their relational configurations quite profoundly, to enter alliances or conversely to stage intense local political confrontations with PP and Ciudadanos party. Local political leaders, young and often unknown before taking up these posts, remain isolated and have been targeted by interest groups. But they have succeeded in building a distinctive political leadership and they have embarked on projects with great symbolic power. To do this, they have marshalled multiple political and electoral resources. Mobility has been one of the vehicles of a discourse founded on reforming behaviours in the public arena. Street network projects have come to embody gradual but visible improvement; consultation processes have driven the dynamic of participation and rivalry between cities. In political narratives, the winning of international trophies and prizes has been used as symbols of a redemption in the external image of cities tarnished by corruption scandals.

Nonetheless, this research highlights the «path dependency» of the current programmes by reference to decisions taken by the previous municipal governments, including right-wing administrations. In this respect, these municipalities of change are broadly updating and

modernising urban models that were already under construction, a process that is not confined to the Spanish context and is taking place in all big western cities at different paces. The originality we found in spanish cities trajectory towards a new mobility policy framing is not in the content of decisions but in the political style employed and in the way arguments are mobilized. The use of moral narratives, the clear focus on civilising goals, the emotional and affective referents in mobility discourses are omnipresent, in a nutshell ideological use of mobility is omnipresent (Passafaro *et al.*, 2014). This can be contextually explained by the political moment in Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia from 2015 to 2019 and by local power relations. Yet, the intensity of the conflicts aroused and the visceral resistance of supporters of the automobile (Cebollada 2012) suggest that governing through mobilities is, in one hand politically risky, in another hand dubious in terms of medium and long term overall transformative effects.

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	MADRID	BARCELONA	VALENCIA
Name of mayor deputy Political affiliation Name of area	Inès Sabanès Izquierda unida- Ahora Madrid “Environnment and mobility”	Janet Sanz Initiativa per Catalunya Verds- Barcelona en Comù “Ecology, urbanism and mobility”	Giuseppe Grezzi Verds Equo - Coalición Compromís “Mobility and public space”
Main projects of former municipality	- area residencial (2004)	- manzanas project (car speed reduction in inner city)	- ciclocalles (cycle lanes in inner city)
Bike-sharing system name, year of launching	- Bicimad (2014)	- Bicing 2007	- Valenbisi (2010)
Main aims of mobility policy	- Combating air pollution	- Taming car congestion	- Changing public space use
Symbolic place for moblity change	- Gran Via (extending borderwalks and closing it punctually to car traffic)	- plaza Gloriès (a tunnel is being built for car traffic)	- Townhall plaza reform - “Annel”: Bike lane around inner city
Best time to promote mobility issues in municipal agenda	- Christmas time (closure of Gran Via to car traffic) - Summer festivals (*Orgullo gay* and *Madcool*)	- none	- Spring: (Fallas) - Fall: European mobility week, bicifest, ..
Planning	- Extension of bike lanes in the center and toward periphery - Requalification of public space	- Extension of bike lanes - Requalification of public space	- Extension of bike lanes - Requalification of public space (Lonja’s place, Townhall place, and many other)
Mobility rules	- Carparking facilities reduction - Limitation of car use in the city center	- Limitation of car use in the city center - attempt to regulate new vehicles (electric skates, free floating vehicles)	- Carparking facilities reduction - New mobility plan in Valencia - New bike circulation plan
Mobility as a public service	- Bicimad concession renegociated - Madrid municipaly and Car2go (carpooling) contract	- Bicing concession renegociated - Conflict with carpooling societies	- Valencia bus authority strongly supported
Reaction of municipal opposition	- No solution to VTC / taxis battle - Dangerosity of bike circulation	- No solution to VTC / taxis battle - Lightrail project in Barcelona stopped	- Too many projects, city paralysed