

Exploring metropolitan identity. The case of Barcelona

Draft paper

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Abstract

The debate on how metropolitan areas, urban agglomerations and, more recently, city-regions, should be governed has become recurrent in the field of urban studies. However, the debates have mainly focused on efficiency, while studies on identity and democracy in this context are still scarce, and mainly focused on the relationship between size, institutions and citizen participation. In this article we focus on one aspect of this debate: the relationship between citizen participation, identity and institutional building. Based on the Barcelona case, and building on previous results from a survey, we report results from a qualitative analysis to analyze how citizens conceive the metropolitan area in terms of their attachment to the space and their political orientations towards it.

1. The democratic deficit in metropolitan governance

The debate on how metropolitan areas, urban agglomerations and, more recently, city-regions, should be governed has become recurrent in the field of urban studies (for a review see Savitch and Vogel, 2009; Tomàs, 2012). However, the question of identity and democracy in urban regions has scarcely been dealt with (see for instance Heinelt and Kübler, 2005) and merits more critical attention (Purcell, 2007).

Traditionally, the debate has been focused on the conflicting views of the reform and the public choice schools, dominant between 1920 and 1980. Already widely analyzed (see, Keating, 1995; Stephens and Wikstrom, 2000) the “old regionalisms” differ in their conception of the optimal scale for achieving citizen satisfaction, measured not only as higher efficiency in the delivery of services (output legitimacy) but also as better quality of democracy and citizen participation (input legitimacy). For the defenders of “bigger is better”, the creation of metropolitan governments with juridical and financial autonomy and directly-elected representatives should enhance the output and input legitimacy of urban regions. Differently, the “small is beautiful” perspective considers local autonomy as the best guarantee for ensuring an efficient delivery of services and higher citizen participation. In their opinion, small municipalities enable political accountability and allow citizens to get easily involved in the policy-making process.

From the 1990s, in the context of globalization and the internationalization of the economy, the new regionalist approach has mainly focused on the improvement of economic competitiveness of urban agglomerations (Norris, 2001). The idea of efficiency in the delivery of services continues to be central, while the debate on democracy has focused on the transition from “government to governance”, that is,

the inclusion of other public and private actors in the process of policy-making (Savitch and Vogel, 2000; Jouve, 2003). The move from government to governance can be an opportunity or a threat for local democracy, depending on the degree of transparency and accountability in public-private arrangements (Kübler and Wälti, 2001).

More recently, the debate around the concept of city-regionalism has been dominated by the discussion regarding economic competitiveness. Indeed, the consideration of city-region formation as a “by-product of macro-restructuring” (Jonas and Ward, 2007: 175) has been common. This has led to the conceptualization of city-regions in terms of economic agency and the regional scale as a ‘functional space’ for economic planning and political governance (Keating, 1998). Therefore, this approach would fail to integrate the role of politics and the mechanisms through which the agents attempt to influence change (Harding, 2007), leaving aside the questions of democracy and legitimacy in urban agglomerations.

Metropolitan areas, urban agglomerations or city-regions, no matter how we call them, are not fixed entities: they also have a symbolic and political dimension, they are imagined and constructed (Deas and Giordano, 2003; Tomàs, forthcoming). As Jones and MacLeod (2004: 435) have developed, we can distinguish between “regional spaces” and “spaces of regionalism”. The first is meant to denote the economic or functional dimension while the second deals with the political attempts of constructing regionalism. Regional spaces are claimed to be the heart of the new globalized economy and the spaces of regionalism are the expression of demands for political and citizenship rights linked to a socially constructed territory. To what extent urban regions are spaces where a collective narrative is being built? Paasi (2003: 477) identifies different elements that compose narratives of regional identity: ideas on nature, landscape, the built environment, culture/ethnicity, dialects, economic success/recession, periphery/centre relations, stereotypic images of a people/community, etc. Do we find them in urban regions? Who are the actors behind these narratives? Are urban regions becoming new spaces of solidarity and citizenship? To sum up, is there a metropolitan identity?

There are some specific studies of metropolitan citizenship which analyze the institutional, social and contextual factors that can contribute to build a “regional consciousness” (Kübler, 2005) or “intermunicipal political orientations” (Lidström, 2010, 2013). From the institutional perspective, articles illustrating the reform vs public school debate analyze the relationship between size and democracy in urban regions (Lyons et al., 1992; Kelleher and Lowery, 2004). However, other studies based on case-studies show that, apart from size and the place of residence –which is linked to the opposition central city/suburbs- other social and contextual factors influence this relationship. Among these, authors have highlighted density (Tavares and Carr, 2012), socioeconomic factors like social class and race (Oliver, 2001), sub-national political cultures (Kübler, 2005) and religious beliefs (Owens, 2010). Commuting and the size of city-regions are also explicative factors of public participation in the case of Swedish urban agglomerations (Lidström, 2006, 2010, 2013). To sum up, the metropolitan dimension of political participation needs to be explored through different patterns of explanations, suggesting the complexity of the phenomenon.

However, there are neither complete nor comparative studies combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The specificity of city-regions challenges the traditional methods of participation and asks for other means to include the views not only of residents but also of commuters, visitors or property-

owners. Indeed, urban agglomerations are by definition discontinuous and changing territories, spaces for the day-to-day life but lacking in most cases of political institutions and collective symbols to identify with. At the same time, political conflicts taking place in urban regions challenge the issues of identity and legitimacy as well as traditional ways of mobilization. As Lidström states: “Many questions remain unanswered, in particular whether it is possible to identify different types of intermunicipal political orientations and, if so, whether these have distinct explanations” (Lidström, 2013: 283).

The aim of this paper is to contribute to this debate with a specific case-study, the metropolitan area of Barcelona. Do people feel identified with the metropolitan scale? Is there a shared narrative? To what extent institutional fragmentation influences the existence of a metropolitan identity? We build upon previous results of quantitative survey data analysis to carry out a qualitative analysis on how citizens conceive the metropolitan area of Barcelona in terms of their attachment to the place and their political orientations towards it.

The paper is organized in the following sections. Section 2 introduces key elements of both the metropolitan development and institutional evolution of Barcelona. In section 3 we briefly introduce our focus group methodology, and section 4 presents and compares its main results with those obtained by the authors through quantitative survey data analysis. We conclude with a general discussion.

2. Metropolitan governance in Barcelona

Metropolitan governance in Barcelona is a complex matter. At an upper level, Barcelona is the capital city of Catalonia, one of the 17 decentralized regions (Autonomous communities) of Spain. At a lower level, Barcelona is mapped onto a highly fragmented local system. 36 municipalities integrate the 3.2 million metropolitan citizens within a highly populated and densely urbanized metropolitan area, with a number of medium to small-sized cities surrounding Barcelona, and integrated into a close-knit network of subway, highways, railroads, and bus lines. The metropolitan area of Barcelona is the center of a larger urban agglomeration that gathers almost 5 million inhabitants. In the last 50 years, the metropolitan area of Barcelona has experienced a demographic evolution similar to the biggest Spanish cities. Three main phases of evolution have been commonly distinguished (Nel-lo, 2004; Martí-Costa et al., 2011). From 1960 to 1975, big cities grew with the arrival of migrants from rural Spanish regions. The City of Barcelona experienced an accelerated population growth during the 1960s and the 1970s, reaching 1.9 million inhabitants in 1979, while the metropolitan area reached 3 million. From 1975 onwards the growth has continued, but its pace has been slower, and over the last two decades urban areas have evolved towards a relative sprawl model. The second phase (up until the 1990s) is characterized by a process of suburbanization and an increase of inter-municipal metropolitan migrations. Central cities suffered from a steady loss of population who moved out of the city to the surrounding municipalities, thus increasing the population of second-ring municipalities. For instance, in 1996, the City of Barcelona had 1.5 million citizens, while the metropolitan region of Barcelona (including the second-ring municipalities) reached 4.2 million. Two factors explain this process: the housing market (differences of housing prices and supply) and the capacity of commuting (higher motorization and better public transport).

Starting in 2000, the present trend involves an increasing consumption of land, a loss of population in central municipalities, and increased growth occurring in metropolitan peripheries with relatively lower density patterns. This phase is characterized by two simultaneous trends. First, the arrival of foreign population to central cities; they represented 17% of total population of the City of Barcelona in 2012. Its population has been hitherto stable around 1.6 million inhabitants. Second, and paradoxically, there has been an increase of intra metropolitan migration, especially towards the metropolitan region and the rest of Catalonia. In 2007 around 15% of the Catalan electorate lived in a different municipality to that in which they had lived 10 years earlier (Alberich, 2010). These changes presented a predominant direction of movement that can be best summarized as a shift “inside out and from large to small” (Alberich, 2010), that is, migratory flows have been from the Barcelona conurbation towards the regions lying in the interior of Catalonia, and from the more populated municipalities to smaller cities. In short, the metropolitan area of Barcelona is characterized by continuous growth and increasing (residential and daily) mobility. There is more and more separation between the place of residence and the place where daily life unfolds: for example, in 2006, more than half of the Catalan population worked outside the municipality where they lived (Alberich, 2010).

Institutionally, both regional and municipal tiers of government are strong. Catalonia has ample legislative and executive powers over a wide range of areas such as housing, urban and regional planning, agriculture, transport, health, education, social welfare, language, and culture. In turn, municipalities also present directly elected legislatures, which elect the mayor, but have weak fiscal autonomy (most of the revenues coming from the central government). The Spanish local government belongs to the Napoleonic model (Hesse and Sharpe, 1991), characterized by strong local identity at the expense of local autonomy. In other words, the essence of local government is political rather than functional. Local governments are considered to embody territorial communities and office holders are expected to represent the interests of their communities in relation to other tiers of government. This “political localism” (Page, 1991) explains local fragmentation and the advocacy for keeping small units of government. Politically both municipal and regional levels of government have also been deemed relevant by citizens. First, in Catalonia separate elections are held for national, regional and local legislatures, and turnout in regional and local elections has been notable (averaging 61% for both). Second, due to the existence of a specific Catalan national identification and the strong institutionalization of both regional and local governments, citizens present consistently high levels of knowledge and identification with both tiers of government.

In this context, the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (MAB) was created in July 2010 and officially constituted after the local elections of May 2011. The MAB has responsibilities in public transport, environment, economic development and urban planning. Despite this new design, the MAB is not directly elected: mayors and councilors of the different municipalities have seats in the metropolitan council according to their population. The political relationship of citizens living in the metropolitan area is therefore articulated through local elections. The law on the MAB put an end to the existing institutional fragmentation with the creation of a new metropolitan body. However, other public companies and agencies dealing with metropolitan issues exist—e.g., the Metropolitan Authority of Transport, responsible for the integration and coordination of all public transport, currently covers more than 200 municipalities.

The path towards the institutionalization of the MAB has been long and conflictive because both of political reasons (rivalry between political parties) and conflicts between the central city and the suburbs (Tomàs, 2010). The new institution created in 2011 had the approval of the mayors, but the perception that the City of Barcelona tends to dominate the metropolitan area has not disappeared. Actually, the mayor of Barcelona is the president of the MAB, and the budget of the City of Barcelona in 2012 was four times larger than the budget of the MAB.

Parallel to the institutionalization of the metropolitan area there has been a process of metropolitan strategic planning, conceived of as the instrument to integrate a collective vision and to design the main guidelines of the development of the metropolitan area. The Metropolitan Strategic Plan includes the participation of representatives from 36 municipalities and other actors such as employer organizations, trade unions, chambers of commerce, Fair of Barcelona, Port and Airport of Barcelona, and universities. Underlying the Metropolitan Strategic Plan was a shared weariness towards institutional fragmentation and the belief that a single, common metropolitan authority would perform better for local interests. Indeed, in 2010 all political parties gave their vote for its creation. However, both the process of strategic planning and the approval of the law on the metropolitan area have been directed by political elites, without actual citizen participation.

A number of reasons would indicate that the existence of a metropolitan identity among the population of the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona is quite unlikely. First, the metropolitan institutional path has been far from straightforward and clearly dominated by the metropolitan center (Barcelona). Second, albeit recent, the recent metropolitan institution is not elected as are the strongly institutionalized upper and lower tiers of government in Catalonia. Third, such identification would take place in an already rich cognitive political map, characterized by strong subjective national identifications (either Spanish or Catalan) and equally strong levels of attachment to municipalities. Fourth, the process of metropolitan strategic planning has been led by political and economic elites with an exclusive participation of major interest groups and organizations. And fifth, the significant level of residential mobility occurred within the (already blurred) metropolitan boundaries would make it difficult for a metropolitan identification to settle down.

Taking into account this evolution and institutional context, one would expect low identification with the metropolitan area. Nevertheless, no data about political orientations or patterns of identity towards the metropolitan area among the metropolitan population have been gathered so far. As a result, citizen preferences and orientations on the governance structure of the metropolitan area have been largely ignored.

3. Methodology

Results reported here come from two different sources and methods. First, we provide preliminary results from a survey carried out within the MAB in 2013 (for a more thorough analysis and presentation of results, see Vallbé, Tomàs and Magre, 2013). The sample included 800 individuals (16 years old or older) with at least one year of residence in Catalonia. The sample follows a distribution of 400 individuals for the city of Barcelona, and 400 from the metropolitan area. Data have been weighted according to the actual population weight of each territorial area.

Second, in order to obtain a more subtle and qualitatively rich complement to these survey data, discussion groups were carried out with individuals from the metropolitan area of Barcelona. In particular, we carried out four discussion groups between late January and early February 2014. On average, seven people from the metropolitan area of Barcelona participated in each group. The discussion sessions lasted around two hours each and the questions were the same that were asked in the previous survey. Discussions were audio recorded and transcribed literally. In contrast to surveys, focus groups do not seek statistical representativeness but help understanding the findings of quantitative methods (Barbour, 2013). They enable the researchers to better grasp the opinions and conceptions of an issue, in this case, territorial identities and political orientations towards metropolitan governance. The discussion, oriented by a facilitator, enhances to go deeper into the meaning that individuals attribute to abstract concepts such as “identity”, “metropolitan area” or “democracy”. As far as we know, no qualitative work has been done so far to study metropolitan democracy and citizenship.

4. Exploring metropolitan identity: main results

The combination of both sources of results naturally provides interesting and abundant information. In this paper we focus on two questions: the types of metropolitan identity and political orientations towards metropolitan governance.

4.1 Types of metropolitan identity

Despite its only recent institutionalization, the results from the first survey yielded surprisingly high levels of both knowledge and identification towards the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (MAB). In the first place, the survey shows a widespread knowledge about its existence among the affected population. Despite knowledge of the MAB is high in all areas of residence, almost all (96.75 percent) the respondents living in the central city (Barcelona) know that their city belongs to the MAB. On the other hand, knowledge is less widespread among respondents living in the surrounding metropolitan municipalities (82.5 percent). Focus groups were useful to understand how the citizens living in the MAB conceived this territory. We asked them a definition of the MAB and the general idea was a weak knowledge of the territory. In other words, citizens that answered the survey declared that they knew that their municipality of residence belonged to the MAB. Differently, citizens who participated in the focus group expressed ambiguous definitions of the MAB. The following quotations illustrate some of the participant’s views¹:

The metropolitan area of Barcelona is Barcelona and its surroundings. Is all that exists on the periphery of Barcelona.

¹ We have translated the original Catalan and Spanish responses into English to enable a better readership of the paper.

You see everything, but you know nothing: you drive through the surrounding roads or the highway and you can see all the municipalities (Badia, Hospitalet)², but you have no idea where you are.

The metropolitan area is a crossing point, a commuting zone for a massive amount of people that go from home to work, but you never stop here.

You can't talk about the metropolitan area as a whole because there are beautiful cities, there are high-class cities, but most of them are commuter towns, in which people, well, they sleep there, they do their things, their shopping even, but they commute to work in Barcelona or in the factories of the second metropolitan belt surrounding Barcelona.

In the second place, the survey showed high identification with the MAB. Measured through a 0 to 10 scale, it delivered an average level of identification of 7.4, only slightly below the average level at which respondents identified toward their own municipality (7.8) and Catalonia (8), and notably above the average level of identification toward Spain (6.1). Moreover, respondents from the City of Barcelona showed significantly higher levels of metropolitan identity than citizens of the surrounding metropolitan area, even controlling for age and education. After these first results, the focus groups allowed us to understand that metropolitan citizens have two kinds of identification. With the municipality, it would be an emotional identification: it is where they feel comfortable ("at home"), where they have friends and family; in other words, where they feel rooted. Quoting some of the participants:

I began feeling rooted in Viladecans when I attended the municipal walk-in clinic or went to restaurants, or... and then you meet people you already know. At that moment you're from that place.

The ties that you have, with other people, with the landscape, you can develop a certain bond with people, with spaces, that make you feel part of a particular place.

I believe that there's something in it about feeling good in that particular place, that you feel like home... When I am in Barcelona I feel outside and when I am home I feel good, in my territory, the territory that you handle.

Differently, the identification with the metropolitan area is mainly functional: essentially, it serves to move (the great symbol of the MAB is the T-10, the transportation ticket) and to access to different kind of activities (culture, shopping, and leisure). We quote some of these ideas:

The metropolitan area is a very comfortable thing because it brings you from one extreme of Barcelona to the other and you can go wherever you want through a great amount of transport lines (metro, bus and whatnot). We don't have a car and we go everywhere by metro and bus.

I think the metropolitan area is the area where you move (...). The metropolitan area is a set of services connected by a transport system and you go where you need to go.

Indeed, some of the participants were even surprised that the focus group referred to questions such as identity related to the metropolitan area. Some of them recognized that they had never thought about that before. In most of the cases, they conceive the MAB as an abstract institution, as an administrative division, and they don't feel particularly attached to this territory.

² Participants refer to different municipalities of the MAB: Badia del Vallès, Viladecans, Badalona, l'Hospitalet del Llobregat, etc.

For me the metropolitan area is just like the Diputació de Barcelona [the provincial government of Barcelona], I don't know what is it... it's an entity.

I have no feeling of belonging; in my opinion the metropolitan area is just an administrative entity.

However, the qualitative approach helped us dig into more subtle aspects of the metropolitan life. In particular, due to the demographic history of the area, our qualitative data suggest that differences in identity might exist in part of the population due to their Spanish origin, namely people born in other parts of Spain who immigrated to the MAB in the 1960-70s. Although this was not a part of our previous quantitative study, a preliminary hypothesis would suggest that people who arrived from other parts of Spain tend to feel less rooted in the municipality where they live, as they mostly remain tied up in their town of birth. It is interesting to note that this group identifies the MAB with a lifestyle, linked to their social class (low and middle-class). This group identifies the MAB with the territory of the working class people, a characteristic that is not perceived by people born in Catalonia. These citations are illustrative of this idea:

People here have a low economic level. Middle-low level. That's what I believe the metropolitan area is, mainly (...) If someone asks me: "What is the metropolitan area?" Well, I'd tell you, look, where middle-lower class people live, or try to live, to survive or... to live.

Those who live in Hospitalet or Badalona, we do the same things. And the others, they do exactly the same in their towns. Because I have work mates who live in Badalona, others who live in other towns, and they do exactly the same things that I do. Most weekends they either go to Barcelona, or, as they tell me, if they go to the cinema they go to a cinema in Barcelona, as we do, if they go to the theater, they come to Barcelona, because there are no theaters on the other side.

This group of participants clearly distinguishes Barcelona from the other municipalities neighboring the city. As they note, the cost of living is more expensive in Barcelona, which is associated to different types of people having different lifestyles:

The difference is that in Barcelona there are a lot of tourists, but... the difference is that in the metropolitan area there are no tourists.

Younger people go to cheaper areas, because Barcelona is expensive while in the metropolitan area it's cheaper.

The work that we do make us live in the periphery, because the city center is for just a few because in the city center of Barcelona there's another kind of people, another type of life, a different way of life.

These quotations illustrate a common fact: people tend to identify the City of Barcelona with the center of Barcelona (the old city and the more centric neighborhoods). Other neighborhoods of the city, where you can find a socioeconomic profile of the residents similar to this group of participants, are not considered as part of Barcelona (they are also considered as the periphery). Indeed, the debate on metropolitan identity highlights the importance of symbolic dimensions such as center and periphery, which are variable depending on the point of view of the residents in the diverse parts of the metropolitan area.

4.2 Political orientations towards metropolitan governance

Secondly, our interest lies in the political perception of the MAB, which we translate into two questions.

1) Do you think that there should be a Greater Barcelona, i.e. merging all the municipalities of MAB to become one city? And 2) Do you support the direct election of one single mayor for the whole MAB?

In accordance with this, the survey shows that almost half of people outside Barcelona city reject the idea of mergers. The smaller the town, there is more fear of "being eaten up by the city" (in the words of the participants in the focus groups). Indeed, there is a general rejection to be diluted in a big city and lose the specific features of the town, basically identity and proximity.

Barcelona has eaten up the smaller towns, Barcelona began eating up in the past and now they want to follow up, but we won't let them.

The sensation is just as if it were an ever growing stain and we must keep our identity, we must avoid being eaten up as were the people from [the current Barcelona neighborhood of] Gràcia.

I would fear that proximity should be lost, because no one would know what are the social needs, etc. Resources might be better managed from a wider lens, but... I don't know, it's not clear to me.

However, some agree that a kind of coordination should be done to be more efficient in the delivery of services. They realize that some of the services need supramunicipal coordination, for instance, public transport. Some participants are aware of the conflicts between municipalities when it comes to share scarce resources:

Do I step down from my bus in the boundary of the next town and step up to a different bus? There must be someone that coordinates this. You can't have citizens stepping up and down different buses all the time and wasting their time. This has to be solved. Who has to solve it out? Double administration... not necessarily. The same amount of money that you were going to spend in your city can be aggregated with the rest of the money and we'll see where we can get to.

I believe that management has to be done on the ground, but resources must be should from an upper level because otherwise people would fight over it and if each small village wants to have it all it would be anarchy, and that's impossible because everyone would have their things but none of them would work out, because it wouldn't meet the needs. Everything has to be coordinated from outside and managed on the ground, because there has to be someone that decides what hospital is built, it can't be in the very same town, it has to be done from an upper level, with a global vision, because every town can't have their own hospital.

Also, according to the previous survey, half of the metropolitan population would be favorable to choose one single mayor for all the MAB, but again differences are observed depending on the respondents' municipal size. The survey showed, in addition, systematic differences among citizens of the central city and the surrounding metropolitan area. In particular, citizens of neighboring municipalities presented significantly lower levels of support to electing one single metropolitan mayor compared to those living in Barcelona, even after adding potentially strong controls such as length of residence. Furthermore, the smaller the municipality, the more opposed to directly choose a mayor for all the MAB. Participants in the focus group expressed the concern that a metropolitan mayor would not have the

understanding and the tools to solve the problems of smaller municipalities. In this regard, they support the idea that small municipalities enable better accountability and citizen satisfaction:

If you're too close and a municipal representative goes rogue, you find him in the street and you can tell him: "listen, what are you doing?" And this representative will have a dissuasive power against him during his term, and then democracy is of higher quality.

If you demand for the construction of a retirement home in some neighborhood, you now can go to the town hall, and if you go there every day, you insist, the town hall will finally give up, because there a lot of votes at stake in that neighborhood. Yet, if you have the same problem but you have to go to Barcelona and ask for a retirement home in my neighborhood, Llefià, they will say: "well, we might lose 1000 votes in that neighborhood, it's not too much" But moreover then there would be much more problems, because a neighborhood asks for something, and if there's just one decision-maker and all neighborhoods demand things, who is this person going to listen first? If there is one representative for each municipality... if all of us go and demand things to just one representative, he won't have the time for all of us.

Each city must have someone in charge because each city has its own needs and at this moment these needs are not fulfilled, one single person cannot be in charge of a lot of different towns.

Moreover, most participants in the focus groups think that a direct election for a single metropolitan mayor would entail that "Barcelona would decide everything" and therefore the citizens of smaller municipalities would be left apart. Indeed, they assume that a metropolitan mayor would mostly represent the interests of Barcelona³:

They already have a lot of problems even having one representative for each neighborhood discussing with the Mayor, and the Mayor is always saying that there's not enough money... Imagine this guy has to go to Barcelona, the Mayor will tell him no, because he will prioritize Barcelona over other areas, because of tourism.

I don't see this as operative, because problems won't be solved. No, no, no. The small fish is always, always left out.

Some of the participants, though, would be in favor of removing elected officials if they really could be sure that the loss of the local mayor would increase the quality of services and simplify management. In general, however, people who participated in focus groups showed a widespread distrust towards the political elite. Indeed, the arguments in favor of a single mayor are related to the feeling of distrust towards politicians.

It would be OK with me. The less politicians, the better.

If we reduce the number of politicians, it's perfect to me. If they continue to be the same ones in a different way, instead of being the mayor now I'm going to be the representative for Esplugues, no, because we gain nothing. We have to get rid of politicians. The issue is deleting politicians. If we get rid of politicians I agree with anything.

³ It is worthy to remember that the president of the MAB is the mayor of Barcelona.

5. Conclusions

Even if the world is becoming largely urbanized, there is scarce evidence on the identification of citizens with urban regions. This paper presents preliminary results on the case of the metropolitan area of Barcelona based on both quantitative and qualitative data. Among other aspects, our research focuses on two issues: the existence of a metropolitan identity and the political orientations towards metropolitan governance.

In relation to the first topic, our research confirms what other studies have pointed to: size matters, but also do contextual, cultural and socioeconomic factors. In this regard, our main contribution is the differentiation of two coexisting types of identification at the metropolitan level. The most common identification is rather functional: people conceive the metropolitan area as a territory where people move and do activities, not a territory to which they feel emotionally attached (and contrary to the municipality). Nevertheless, for a specific group of population (those who immigrated to the metropolitan area 40 years ago) the metropolitan area is associated with a certain idea of community, a common lifestyle, which is directly linked to their middle-low social class. Differently to the US, in our case the central city is, on average, richer than most of the surrounding municipalities (there are few exceptions). Although focus groups are not statistically representative, this is an interesting feature that did not appear in the survey.

In relation to the second question, that is, political orientations towards metropolitan governance, we report similar results from other researches. Citizens from small municipalities reject the creation of a mega-city in the name of local autonomy and democracy. Moreover, they object to the direct election of a single mayor for the whole metropolitan area because they consider that their local needs would be neglected at the expense of the citizens of Barcelona. However, and specifically due to both the Spanish political culture and current context of political distrust, some of the participants would agree on having one single mayor in order to have less politicians.

The relationship between metropolitan consolidation and democracy has been widely examined. As for the metropolitan area of Barcelona, it was constituted as an institution in 2011. In our case, the institutionalization of metropolitan governance has not led to stronger levels of identification. However, three years are not enough to see the effect of the existing institution on citizen's political attitudes. In this regard, the fact that the metropolitan institution fundamentally carries out hard policies –public transportation, waste sewage, and water management- may explain the lack of identification with the metropolitan area. Moreover, the existence of other strong levels of attachment (local, regional and national) may limit the influence of another identity.

In any case, future research needs to be carried to contrast these preliminary results. More comparative studies are necessary in order to understand the complexity and subtlety of metropolitan identity, as well as to explain the differences in “feeling metropolitan”.

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