



## **Centre on Migration, Policy and Society**

**Working Paper No. 19,  
University of Oxford, 2005**

**Immigrants and the Politics of  
Governance in Barcelona**

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**WP-05-19**

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# Immigrants and the Politics of Governance in Barcelona

## **Abstract:**

Governance is commonly described as the governmental form typical of late-modernity resulting from the collaboration between government and civil society. Governance – we are told – is to be preferred to previous governmental patterns for not only is it more cost-effective but also participatory and empowering. This paper takes such claims at face value and examines them ethnographically to see how they are applied in relation to immigrants in the ‘progressive’ city of Barcelona, paying particular attention to the meaning of participation and empowerment. The paper argues that immigrants’ participation in governance *de facto* means participation in token consultative institutions and in policy-implementation by proxy (i.e. through native ‘pro-immigrant’ NGOs hired to deliver public services to immigrants). It also argues that the empowerment that derives from participating in governance is greater for the government (which gain legitimization and a politically correct image) and for the native non-profit ‘immigration industry’ (contracted to deliver public services) than it is for immigrants, who are largely politically neutralised and excluded from the formal political system.

## **Keywords:**

Governance, Migrants, Spain, Participation, Anthropology, Ethnography, Policy

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## **Acknowledgement:**

An earlier version of this working paper was presented at the workshop ‘Hegemony – Regulation – Governamentality – Governance. What’s in a term?’ of the 8th EASA conference Vienna 8-12 Sept 2004. This paper has benefited from the insightful comments of Eliseu Carbonell, Anna Clua, Greg Feldman, Ralph Grillo, Kristine Krause, Liza Schuster, Gavin Smith, Michael Smith, Alisdair Rogers, Sue Wright and Elisabetta Zontini whom I wish to thank.

## **Immigrants and the Politics of Governance in Barcelona**

Governance, immigration and multiculturalism constitute important and much debated topics in contemporary Europe. This paper discusses the question of *governance* in the context of immigration and multiculturalism from an anthropological perspective, i.e. one which pays particular attention to social practices and relations in their everyday settings. The paper begins by presenting the term *governance* as it is currently and commonly defined (especially in policy and academic circles). Then, after a brief methodological discussion, it presents some ethnographic material on *governance* in the context of immigration and multiculturalism collected through fieldwork in Barcelona. The paper will end with critical considerations on the notion, especially in relation to its participatory and empowering dimensions.

### **Governance: the meaning of the term**

In its current meaning *governance* appeared in English-speaking political and academic circles at the end of the 1980s but it wasn't until the mid-1990s that its usage became common (Heywood 2000; Taylor 2002)<sup>1</sup>. But what does governance mean? Currently, the widespread understanding of governance seems to be that of the process of management of society resulting from the systematic collaboration between government and the citizenry with its civic organisations<sup>2</sup> (see Pierre and Peters 2000; John 2001). In the historical move from government to governance there is a transformation in the roles played by both civil society and government, which is recurrently explained through the use of the nautical metaphor of 'steering' and 'rowing' (e.g. see Heywood 2000). Today – the argument goes – modern and rational governments should no longer be about 'rowing' society, i.e. it is no longer their duty to provide directly for all those services, administrative and economic interventions that once characterised them. Modern government should be about 'steering'

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<sup>1</sup> In Spanish *governance* has been translated in a number of ways, and it was only at the end of the 1990s that the term *gobernanza* began to be used frequently (see Solà 2000).

society, that is to say limited to functions such as setting targets and strategic objectives which now that it has found the way – governance – of freeing itself from the burden of ‘rowing’ it can do much better. If economic decisions are increasingly self-regulated and if governments are now about setting targets and strategic objectives, providing services and administration becomes a responsibility of the citizenry and its organisations. In both policy-making and academic circles the remarkable reshaping of ideas about the role and nature of government involved in the move from government to governance is commonly explained and promoted with the advantages and qualities that the latter regime is supposed to bring about, such as being cheaper, more efficient and effective as well as more democratic, participatory and empowering. Governance is considered as a superior governmental pattern capable of satisfying the needs of a ‘modernizing’ state, that is a state which is on its way to becoming slimmer, cheaper, more cost-effective, and closer to its people. Of course, this is not a neutral but a positive – almost Salvationist – representation of governance<sup>3</sup> as well as an abstract one whose validity especially in terms of participation and empowerment the remainder of this paper will explore through ethnography in a specific setting, that of multi-ethnic Barcelona<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> These include both so called ‘profit’ and ‘non-profit’ organisations even though it is mainly the latter that will be discussed in this essay as only this type of organisation is involved in the specific instance considered.

<sup>3</sup> In a recent insightful paper discussing the ‘languages of power’, Dahl (2004) identifies three different genres to which a term can belong: the ‘analytical language’ (whose nature is precise and selective and whose aim is cognitive, reflective and classificatory); the ‘political language’ (whose nature is ambiguous and vague and whose aim is to mobilize consensus); and – somewhere in between the previous two types – the ‘policy language’ (whose nature is also ambivalent yet more techno-scientific, neutral and rational-looking and whose aim is also to mobilize consensus but across a wider range of subjects and around more concrete objectives as well as by appealing more heavily to universal values). This typology is quite useful to this paper as it increases our awareness of the genre to which the prevailing usage of ‘governance’ belongs (i.e. ‘policy language’) clarifying its nature and goals.

<sup>4</sup> In this paper governance is used as an heuristic device to delimit with greater precision the object of study which is the set of relationships occurring between the government (/state) and that sector of ‘civil society’ which is directly involved in the production of contemporary governmental action (i.e. policy) targeting immigrants and the implications that such relationships have for these ‘governed’ subjects (especially in terms of empowerment and participation).

## **An anthropological approach to governance**

In spite of the growing body of literature on both governance and immigration certain crucial issues have been overlooked. Much literature on governance has an abstract and normative character, even in those cases in which the notion is criticised and rejected (e.g. Brown 2001; Cassen 2001). Besides, governance is often assumed to refer primarily to the national scale rather than at other levels, not least the local level, in which face-to-face encounters between governmental officials and the citizenry are particularly recurrent and vivid (e.g. between social workers and immigrants). The prevalence of this 'national' conceptualization of governance is reflected in the little empirical research that has been conducted on the everyday practices of *governance*, and this is even more so in the case of multi-ethnic southern European contexts. For its part, scholarship on immigration and multiculturalism has privileged approaches focusing on immigrants as self-contained communities and – more usefully – labour markets and transnationalism, but it has scarcely addressed the involvement of the 'new immigrants' in processes of policy-making and governance. Thus, an empirical examination of governance in multiethnic contexts is particularly useful to move from an abstract, normative and often celebratory conception of governance to a more 'grounded' one which is able to recognise its further dimensions (local, everyday etc.) as well as its possible empirical limitations and shortcomings, especially in connection to power relations and social inclusion.

The approach that has inspired the study on which this paper is based is that of the 'anthropology of policy' (Wright and Shore 1995, Shore and Wright 1997). This is a particular form of political anthropology which takes the field of public policy as an object of study as it recognises in it one of the crucial pillars of the architecture of contemporary societies and therefore considers it as a strategic domain for conducting anthropological studies. Given that policy constitutes a nodal point of intersection and articulation of ideologies, practices, power, contestation and accommodation, it becomes crucial for political anthropologists to include this ambit in the scope of their research making the relevant methodological adjustments required (which include intensive researching

across different levels, processes and sites). The anthropology of policy is an approach characterised by a shift 'from "studying down" and a distanced study of 'a people' to "studying up" and a committed study of policy' (Wright 1995: 73). In my work this approach has been applied by exploring the notion of governance (which represents a particular form of organizing policy-making) in practice through ethnographic fieldwork conducted in multi-ethnic Barcelona. In doing so this paper engages issues like policy, institutions, power, discourse and practice which all lie at the hearth of the anthropology of policy. In this paper I have also sought to contextualize governance in wider political and historical processes.

The questions that have oriented my examination of governance include the following. In which wider project and discourse of social transformation is governance located? What vision of the world and of the social order does the ideology of governance seem to endorse and facilitate? How is governance made authoritative and attractive to the citizenry? How does it seek to mobilize 'civil society'? To what extent does governance 'deliver' what its rhetoric claims? Who is allowed to participate in the processes of governance and conversely, who is not? For what and for whom are regimes of governance operating, and indeed against whom? How does the governance system construct disadvantaged categories such as immigrants? How does it deal with them in practice? How is such treatment of immigrants embedded in hierarchical relations of power?

The operationalization of the approach to governance outlined above has entailed fieldwork, conducted mostly in 2001, and primarily through a combination of participant observation and different types of interviewing across a wide range of situations and sites (including occupied churches; sit-ins; demonstrations; public meetings and discussions; private homes; governmental and non-governmental premises; universities and so forth) and actors (including immigrants and their organizations; municipal and regional politicians and officials; academics; civic activists; trade-unionists; professional NGOs practitioners; employers; and 'ordinary' people). In conducting this activity, my identity as an 'outsider' academic (an Italian coming to Barcelona from the UK) played an ambivalent role in my relationships with

informants. At times, it favoured rapport-building, especially with immigrants, as I was perceived as external to local dynamics and as sharing several aspects of their migratory experience including an 'outsider' identity. At other times, this slowed things down. However, on many occasions this factor made little or no difference, for example in dealing with powerful actors (like politicians or officials or even established NGOs leaders) who tend to be habitually somewhat 'on their guard' when dealing with researchers.

### **The system of governance and the participation of immigrants in Barcelona**

The collaboration between local authorities and civil society – typical of governance – in Barcelona has a relatively long record. It began after the end of Franco's dictatorship (Walliser 2000), but was consolidated during the 1992 Olympic games, when it became more institutionalised. Civic associations started receiving technical support to become service providers, and a number of agencies and different consultative institutions were set up (Walliser 2000). In the field of international immigration – which became prominent in Barcelona since the mid-1980s – this relationship was initially reflected in the creation of the Working Group on Refugees and Foreigners in 1989, where associations working in this field were called by the City Council to advise on their area of expertise. The first contracting out of public services to NGOs and associations dates back to 1991 and concerned the sphere of 'information and counselling'. In that year SAIER (Servei d'Atenció a Immigrants Etrangers i Refugiats) was created and public services started to be provided by the four biggest organisations working on migration, namely ACSAR, CREU ROJA, CITE and Col·legi d'Advocats (see Zapata-Barrero 2002). Towards the end of 1997 the City Council set up the Consell Municipal d'Immigració de Barcelona as a new institution for the consultation and participation of immigrant associations and people (Morén-Alegret 2001; Zapata-Barrero 2002; Ajuntament de Barcelona/CIREM 2002). Before exploring what space of participation in governance is available to immigrants in Barcelona and in order to identify such space with greater precision, I would like to outline

the avenues of political participation that immigrants have in contemporary democratic states.

When immigrants are denied the right to vote there are still (at least) five 'extra-electoral' ways in which they can participate politically, although these are – of course – not as powerful as voting. These alternatives have been identified by Mark Miller (1981) and recently summarised in Zapata-Barrero (2002). Here I will mention them briefly, reminding the reader of their ideal typical nature, as in practice they are bound to be encountered in 'spurious' and overlapping forms. The first is the 'extra-parliamentary' avenue. This can manifest in various forms of protest that include demonstrations in the streets, sit-ins in churches and hunger strikes. The second avenue is that of 'consultative institutions'. This channel is often adopted by local and regional administrations in Southern Europe to palliate for the absence of voting rights. The third avenue is that of 'industrial democracy' which refers to the participation of immigrants in trade unions, industrial commissions and elections for labour councils. The 'organizational avenue' is the fourth channel of participation and refers to the pro-immigrant organisations that, for a variety of solidarity reasons, take up (or claim to take up) the representation of immigrant interests. Among these organisations we find political parties, civic, religious and humanitarian organizations. Miller's fifth avenue of extra-electoral political participation refers to the influence exerted by the country of origin of the immigrants, through the 'diplomatic channel'<sup>5</sup>. When we consider immigrants' participation in governance (in absence of electoral rights) we are, I argue, primarily concerned with two of the five non-electoral avenues of immigrant participation identified by Miller (1981): *consultative institutions* (channel 2 above); and with a specific instance of *immigrants-allied organizations* (channel 4 above), i.e. not all of them but only those that take part in policy-making, as we will see below. But before analysing these avenues in detail, two things must be pointed out regarding the wider context in which the immigrants' participation to governance is located in Barcelona.

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<sup>5</sup> This category could be broadened so as to reflect more adequately the transnational character of contemporary immigrants' political engagements and its implications (on this type of engagement see Østergaard-Nielsen 2003).



In Barcelona, like in the rest of Spain and southern Europe, immigrants cannot vote in any type of elections. This is already a first indication of the low consideration they enjoy. Apart from this basic political neutralisation and dis-empowerment, a further indication of the attitudes that prevail within the local system of governance is found in the views on the possibility of extending local voting entitlements to immigrants that characterise the main political institutions of the city, the Barcelona City Council and the Catalan government (or Generalitat), controlled – at the time of fieldwork – respectively by the Socialists (PSC) and the Nationalists of *Convergència i Unió*<sup>6</sup>. With regard to the Socialists, a high-ranking official representative of the Barcelona City Council<sup>7</sup> in an interview I conducted in 2001 said that in principle the Barcelona City Council is favourable to immigrants voting at local elections (in fact, in 1998 the Council of Barcelona signed the *Carta Municipal de Barcelona* where the political rights of immigrants are recognised as a significant question). However, my interlocutor quite bluntly also stated that the Council was not going to campaign for having such rights implemented<sup>8</sup>. Even less supportive appears the position of the nationalist Generalitat de Catalunya, which – through a high-ranking representative spokesperson – pointed out to me that even though the Catalan government is strongly favourable to promote the participation and integration of immigrants, it is against conceding them voting rights. The reason given was that immigrants cannot understand the complexity of the Catalan national experience and the history of oppression that the Catalan people has undergone. I was also told that, the absence of voting rights is not really a problem for the immigrants as both the Council of Barcelona and the Generalitat of Catalonia have set up specific forums (*els Consells*) where immigrants can express themselves politically. It is in this political context

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<sup>6</sup> The Centre-Right Partido Popular (or PP) is deliberately left out because of its relatively scarce institutional significance in Catalonia. However, I take advantage of this opportunity to point out that the PP was principally responsible for the absence of immigrant voting rights, at least until 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Given the politically charged nature of the issues being addressed in this paper the identity of this and other informants is not revealed to preserve their anonymity.

<sup>8</sup> A position that was confirmed by the personnel of the Regidoria de Drets Civils, a marginal and marginalized body of the Barcelona City Council that on the contrary was campaigning for immigrants' voting rights.

that the participation of immigrants in Barcelona that we will now consider takes place.

*Participation in consultative institutions: els Consells*

According to the statute of *el Consell* as reported in CIREM (1998:37) its objectives and functions are the following.

Objectives:

- It is a consultative organ of participation created to favour equality and to overcome the obstacles that hinder the integration of immigrants so that Barcelona becomes a plural city welcoming all cultures.
- It stands for creating the necessary conditions that will favour the full citizenship for all immigrant people, regardless of their administrative situation.
- It aims at promoting actions to fight racism, discrimination and xenophobia and at favouring the recognition and development of all cultures present in the city.

Functions:

- Promote associationism
- Guarantee the presence in the Consell of all immigrant groups, according to their origin.
- Actively co-operate with the Council of Barcelona in order to develop and evaluate its policies on immigration.
- Gather information on those issues that are debated and approved by the municipal institutions and that are of interest for the immigrant population.
- The agreements, documents, and requests of the Consell will be received by the Municipal institutions as recommendations, in no case can they be considered as legally binding.

*El Consell Municipal d' Immigració* features the participation of several types of pro-immigrants organisations (these include 'autochthonous' organisations, immigrant organisations strictly speaking, and 'mixed' organisations – like the immigration strands of the mainstream unions), as well as representatives of the local authorities and of employers associations.

Having considered the official claims, objectives, functions and participants of *el Consell* it is now important to examine how participation is operationalised. On the actual working of *el Consell*, a first noticeable feature emerged when I asked the relevant Municipal officer to attend their meetings: to my surprise I discovered that *el Consell* is not open to citizens' participation or even just observation or attendance<sup>9</sup>. Despite this difficulty, I have managed to collect some views from some of its immigrant participants. These views highlight the token nature of this institution. It meets very rarely (not more than once or twice a year) and does so regardless of the needs of its immigrant participants. In this regard it is quite illustrative to report what happened in the occasion of the removal (through the use of force) of a group of homeless undocumented sub-Saharan immigrants sleeping in Plaza de Catalunya (Barcelona's central square) in the summer of 2001. According to one of my informants, many pro-immigrant and humanitarian organisations did not like the authoritarian and cavalier way with which the City Council dealt with the issue and asked for an extraordinary meeting of the *Consell* in order to discuss alternative ways to deal with the situation. In his own words:

'The Barcelona City Council has an organism – the *Consell Municipal d' Immigració* ... whose role is that of making proposals and providing expert advice to the City Council. However, when serious events like those of Plaza Catalunya take place the City Council must summon an extraordinary meeting of the *Consell*, but it hasn't. If decisions and interventions are made unilaterally by the City Council that decides what to do all by itself, then what do we have a *Consell* for?!?!?' ...If the *Consell* does not meet when concrete events are occurring then what's the point of having such *Consell*? ...then its meetings are a pure comedy, a pure and dramatic comedy' (my translation).

This view is broadly consistent with that of another immigrant participant to the *Consell* that I interviewed:

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<sup>9</sup> Unless one is able to go through a rather complicated bureaucratic procedure

'The *Consell* doesn't work. They [the Barcelona Council] will tell you that it does work because they recently had a meeting... It does nothing and we are tired to attend meetings in order to do nothing. ...And the *Consell* of the Generalitat is just as bad ...*Consells* only serve to the Catalan institutions as a means to appear concerned with immigrants's rights' (my translation).

Through these examples we have achieved an idea of what participating in governance through the consultative institutions of the *Consells* means in practice for the immigrant population of contemporary Barcelona. In particular, we have become aware of the token nature of this type of institution<sup>10</sup>. We now turn to the other main form of immigrant participation in governance identified in this paper, namely participation in policy-making.

#### *Participation in policy-making*

With regard to the immigrants' participation in policy-making, what seems to emerge from the empirical analysis is the more narrow meaning that this type of participation takes in practice, which is participation in policy-implementation and in particular in the provision of public services and policies that public institutions have designed and contracted out. Participation in this sense is restricted to well-established NGOs (e.g. Caritas, Cruz Roja, SOS Racisme) which are essentially immigrants' allied organizations rather than immigrant organizations and the main trade unions (UGT and CCOO), though a few smaller immigrant organisations are also involved (e.g. IBN Batuta). These are all organisations which, in

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and succeed in being granted permission.

<sup>10</sup> As pointed out in my examination of immigrants' consultative institutions in Italy (Però 2002), it is important to acknowledge that not everything in such institutions is 'negative' as they can represent an opportunity for some immigrants to 'cut their teeth' within the political system of the receiving country and learn how to move more effectively in it. These institutions can also provide their participants with opportunities for personal and career development, networks and social capital-building. Finally, the establishment of such institutions represents a significant – though initial – step in the institutionalization and recognition of the immigrant presence in the political apparatus of the receiving context (and which should soon be complemented with the granting of voting rights to avoid the political ghettoization of the immigrants) which once it has been established it becomes much more difficult to erase.

order to be contracted as service-providers, must meet both 'professional' criteria and – most importantly in this context – 'political' ones (i.e. governmental conformism) also in relation to situations that are not part of the contractual agreements, as the following example illustrates.

In early 2001 a new restrictive immigration law (the 8/2000) produced by the national government of the conservative Partido Popular came into force. In Barcelona a large group of *sin-papeles* (undocumented) immigrants decided to respond with a hunger strike undertaken in several churches of the city. The Socialist Council of Barcelona, despite opposing the new law, asked the immigrants to cease the hunger strike and delegate to the Municipality and other like-minded organisations and forces the task of representing their interests vis-à-vis the national government. At this point the pro-immigrant groups and organisations of Barcelona – while all being critical of the new restrictive *ley de extranjería* – experienced a split along the 'governance line': on one side were those organisations and collectives external to the process of governance (ranging from anarcho-syndicalists to the group of Catholic priests hosting the protest in their churches) which respected (though not necessarily agreed with) and supported the form of protest chosen by the immigrants (i.e. the hunger strike); and on the other side were those that were part of the system of governance and policy-making and which subscribed to the more paternalist, normative and soft stand of the Socialist council .

If the political attitudes and visions of the NGOs participating (or aspiring to participate) in policy-delivery happen not to be fully coincident with those of the governmental hiring body, then the relevant self-disciplining and adjustment must take place so as to offer the public funding body the appropriate image and behaviour. This situation is illustrated by the following episode that took place during the meeting in which the leaders of an NGO (whom I accompanied as a prospective consultant) presented their project of training intercultural mediators to assist municipal personnel in delivering social services to immigrants to high-ranking municipal officials for final approval and feedback. Apart from the image of professionalism projected by the two NGO directors (business-like presentation, talking, posture, dress etc.), what is of

interest here is their acceptance of the statements that the most senior municipal responsible for hiring them made:

'The meeting point between the immigrants and the council personnel is not "half-way". We live in a country with a hierarchy of values and with a more or less established set of practices. The mediation has to be done within this context. It's primarily the immigrants who have to adjust [acercarse] to this context because it is them who have chosen to come into this context. So the meeting point is not an intermediate point but it is closer to the system of values of the receiving context [contexto de acogida]. Moreover, it must be made clear that the mediators will not act as "trade union representatives" of the immigrants because if the mediators turn themselves into trade unionists we are done with it! [ya la hemos liado]'

In the underground train journey that I undertook with the two NGO leaders after the meeting it emerged that they had found the attitudes and requests of the municipal official rather "assimilationist". One of them said he had thought for a moment to question the high official's statement but decided not to and the other praised him for keeping quiet.

The conformist and subaltern role (as well as questionable multiculturalism) that characterises civil society organisations taking part in processes of governance is unlikely to be a peculiarity of Barcelona. As far as my own research activity is concerned, I observed a similar situation in Bologna (see Però 2005 in press; 1997). By showing the subordination and complicity of those sectors of 'civil society' that participate in 'governance' to public administrations, not only does this paper highlight how badly official commitments to cultural recognition and immigrants' inclusion made by public institutions are translated into practice but also questions diffused representations of 'civil society' as virtuous and independent, at least when participating in the governance of immigrants, a process which has also been shown to be less participatory and empowering than its advocates claim. Besides, the insights presented here show that, while there is some room for 'independent-thinking' within the *Consells* – but they are after all token participatory channels – the

degree of conformism required to participate in policy-making (or rather policy-implementation) is very high indeed<sup>11</sup>.

### *Participation beyond governance*

So far we have considered those pro-immigrant organisations which participate in governance. However, in order to achieve a more comprehensive perspective on governance in the context of migration it is important to consider also organisations which, despite being absent from either one or both the two avenues of political participation typical of governance – which are the consultative institutions of the *consells* and policy-making – can still be politically engaged (sometimes in order to resist and challenge the cooptative strategies deployed through governance)<sup>12</sup>. The most significant absence from both these channels is that of undocumented immigrants, a collective of numerical significance whose ‘members’ in many cases have been living and working in Spain for several years and who, as we have seen, had to choose alternative channels to those of governance to voice their demands. Indeed, in doing so they had to go (to an extent) against the main local players of governance (the City Council and the big NGOs) which had asked them to abstain from direct action. Outside the governance avenues we also find those pro-immigrant organisations and movements whose political stand is incompatible or irreconcilable with that of the governing political forces. This incompatibility is often a mutual feeling: the latter consider the former too ‘radical’ in their claims, the former consider the latter scarcely

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<sup>11</sup> This subordination, cooptation and conformism experienced by governance NGOs does not necessarily imply that they have completely ‘sold’ themselves and given up the values they claim to stand for, or that they fail to have any influence on the government. It just draws attention to the high price and degree of compromise that such organisations have to pay (in terms of independence and freedom of action) in exchange for the resources, prestige, benefits and so forth deriving from being part of the governance establishment.

<sup>12</sup> With no claim to exhaustiveness we could use *political engagements* to refer to all forms of social actions (individual or collective) that are concerned with the conservation or transformation of power relations among groups and individuals in society. Accordingly, the notion of political engagements encompasses not only the activities and practices normally associated to the formal/institutional political sphere (like voting, parliamentary and governmental activities) but also the daily activities of non-institutional actors (collective and individual) that are aimed at altering (overtly or covertly) power relations and the everyday practices through which such relations are articulated.

inclusionary<sup>13</sup>. Similar feelings of mutual incompatibility extend to the relationships existing between civic organizations and collectives across the governance lines. For example, during the meetings of the 'radical' *coordinadora* supporting the *sin papeles* sit-in and hunger strike it was rather common to come across critical statements like the following one that was made during a discussion about how best to use the money collected during the protest: "We have to be careful whom we give the money to, as we want to avoid the set up of yet another NGO asking for funds and projects!!!". Indeed in the ambit of the social movement supporting the immigrants' protest the very word *ONG* (NGO) was repeatedly used in a derogatory and sarcastic way to connote something negative. If the civic organisations taking part in the process of governance were regarded with suspicion or as 'collaborationists' and 'after power and careers' they in turn dismissed the former as 'idealist', 'unreasonable', 'unrealistic', 'irresponsible', 'unreliable', 'disorganised' 'unprofessional'. For instance, in an interview with a spokesperson of the well-established *SOS Racisme* the organisations and collectives external to governance like the *coordinadora* and *Papeles para Todos* were regarded and dismissed as 'manipulating' the immigrants as well as being 'resentful'. Thus, through these examples we have achieved a sense of how many immigrants and pro-immigrants groups do not take part in the governance processes because they are excluded from it or because uninterested in it or both.

## **Conclusions**

In examining governance through an anthropological approach in the context of immigration this paper has suggested that governance is neither to be treated as a merely abstract concept nor as a merely national level phenomenon. Informed by the underlying assumption that there is much to be gained from not taking the claims attached to it by the governmental actors themselves at face value and from focusing on both the empirical and multi-level manifestations of governance, this

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<sup>13</sup> Examples of the demands made by these organisations are the concession of papers to undocumented immigrants and the call for substantial policy intervention in the sphere of housing, health and general welfare provision and more equal opportunity in general.



paper has conducted a 'grounded' examination of governance – in the multi-ethnic context of Barcelona – whose results can be summarised as follows.

The first point is about the winners and losers of governance. The case considered here has shown that not all groups in society benefit to the same extent from processes of governance and that, indeed, some benefit and some do not. In Barcelona immigrants seem to scarcely gain from it, caught between neutralisation (through co-optation) and exclusion. On the contrary, those who appear to directly profit from it are the politico-institutional elites and the constellation of non-profit organizations of the 'immigration industry'. The former who – thanks to the (token) apparatuses that they have set up and to the involvement in policy-making of the pro-immigrant NGOs – can now claim to be legitimized, sensitive and representative of immigrants and reinforce their politically correct, progressive and democratic image of multiculturalists. Besides, at a time of crises in their power (eroded by the economic elites and delegitimized by people's political disaffection with formal politics – see Norris 1999; Pharr and Putnam 2000; European Commission 2001), politico-institutional elites have found a way to keep afloat and reinvent a crucial role for themselves (as mediators, facilitators, leaders, controllers etc.). The latter gain from governance by being hired and funded as well as by being elevated to the role of public interlocutor by the former. Indeed these NGOs constitute a booming sector that has been referred to as 'industry' for the economic dimension involved (and which is still almost exclusively made of local or autochthonous membership and which has carved out for itself the role of institutional mediator of immigrants' interests). A third more indirect and veiled – but none the less significant – winner are the economic elites who benefit from the political neutralisation of immigrants (the cheapest sources of labour in society) that the current system of governance helps produce. All the above also suggests that governance is far from constituting, at least in the way it is being applied, a politically neutral governmental pattern, but rather one which is profoundly tied and functional to the reproduction of the *status quo* (i.e. a regime of neo-liberal restructuring).

The second point is about the substantial failure of consultative and participatory institutions in southern Europe. The experience of the immigrants' *Consells* in Barcelona has so far failed to enable immigrants to adequately voice their demands. Given the relative greater social concern and efficiency that characterises Barcelona (in relation to most other southern European cities) the insights gained there are unlikely to constitute an isolated case. Indeed, these insights seem broadly consistent with those gained from the examination of immigrants' consultative bodies in another 'progressive' southern European city – Bologna (see Però 2002) – and are reminiscent of the situation observed in 1970s Lyon by Ralph Grillo (1985). The third point refers to the subaltern role that civil society plays in relation to government/state bodies when it takes part in processes of governance. We have seen how civic organisations are in many ways co-opted and entangled by their taking part in policy-making and how, in fact, this participation means policy-implementation. The fourth point refers to the striking mis-match that seems to exist between the participatory rhetoric of governance (as appearing in representations) and the very limited participatory nature that appears to characterise the application of governance in practice, especially with respect to disadvantaged categories (like the immigrants).

In conclusion, at a time characterised by the rolling back of the state and triumph of neo-liberalism, governance seems to be the governmental pattern deployed to facilitate these transformations and to re-legitimise governments at various levels. Indeed, governance emerges as the discourse deployed by governments and policy makers to make the disciplinary dimension of their governmental action more acceptable to a range of potential opponents. However, governance – it seems to me – need not necessarily be an instrument for the domination and control of disadvantaged sectors of the population. If applied/deployed with serious egalitarian intentions and within an agenda that re-inscribes redistribution and market regulation as part of the possibility of governmental intervention, governance could become an instrument of change, participation and 'empowerment' for the less well-off. So far, even in those cities that praise themselves for being 'progressive' like Barcelona, this egalitarian potentiality of governance has been repressed, and thus this governmental pattern for the moment – at least in the context of

immigration – remains coterminous with the conservation and development of the structural power (Wolf 1990) of late-capitalism.

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