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Do different participatory methods produce coherent results? Citizen participation in Cardedeu's Urban Planning

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In our society, the promotion of citizen participation in the taking of public decisions is on the increase and is starting to become a more and more frequent phenomenon. Especially at a local level, political decision-makers appear increasingly interested in opening new channels allowing them to listen to the citizens and to take them into consideration when planning and executing their work. This interest could be due to the will to breathe new life into the workings of representative democracy and to create a political ideology that believes in the need to increase citizen involvement in public affairs, but it could also be due to a passing fad that has discovered the political returns of participation. Whatever the reason, it is certain that local institutions have long been proffering all sorts of initiatives in order to put into practice examples of citizen participation, and they have thus applied, and continue to apply, different participatory methodologies. On the other hand, without the reasons being very clear, a very large number of these initiatives have revolved around urban planning questions. Thus, and this is especially the case in Spain, many of the participatory processes that have been put into practice have covered subjects related to spatial planning and the planning of services and amenities within this space.

However up to now, when we have spoken about the application of participatory instruments it has been understood that only one specific methodology has been used for each decision to be taken. In each case, the political decision-makers, advised or otherwise by experts in participation, have decided to enact the participatory mechanism they have considered most appropriate when listening to the voice of the citizens. But what happens when two or more participatory methodologies are employed at the same time to take the same decision? This circumstance can be totally plausible, either because we want to have a better idea of what the citizens want on a given subject, because we want to involve as many people as possible in the process of drawing up a public policy or because we want to make the final decision more legitimate. And what happens in these situations? Do different participatory methods produce coherent results? It can perfectly well happen that the results provided by each methodology are different and provide views that could even be the opposite of what they are supposed to be. But in these cases, which is the "right" view, or that which is closer to the reality of what the majority of citizens want? Throughout these pages we shall attempt to resolve all of these questions. In order to do this, we have recourse to a participatory experience that is unique in every way. It is the process of citizen consultation which under the slogan *What do we want Cardedeu to be like?* was conducted in autumn 2000, in this Catalan municipality of some 12,000 inhabitants, and in which two different participatory methodologies came together: a postal survey and a series of Citizen's Councils.

The aim of the survey was to establish the criteria that were to govern the revision of the General Urban Distribution Plan (GUDP) of the municipality. The initiative of the process emerged from the ecological association Cardedeu Vital and the organising technical team comprised the Jaume Bofill Foundation and Policy Analysis Team of the Autonomous University of Barcelona. For its part, the Town Council of Cardedeu became the main driving force behind the process, giving it credibility and publicly guaranteeing that its results would be borne in mind when demanding the modification of the GUDP.

The subject to be dealt with by the survey was limited to two of the essential aspects that the GUDP had to agree on: the population growth desired by the municipality, and the urban planning model to be developed. Within this second theme, a number of questions had to be considered, such as the area to be dedicated to the different uses of the land, the type of distribution that should be adopted by these uses and the type of housing that people wanted to be built in Cardedeu.

At the start of this work we remarked that the citizen consultation *What do we want Cardedeu to be like?* represented a unique participatory experience that had allowed us to answer the question of whether different participatory mechanisms produce heterogeneous results, to the extent that during this process two clearly distinct participatory instruments were used: a postal survey and various Citizen's Councils¹. Are the results produced by both participatory mechanisms similar or are they very different? In the event of their being substantially different, was this difference caused by the fact that the participants in the survey and the Councils showed very different socio-demographic characteristics? Or rather, was the difference in results caused by the different nature of both participatory instruments? Despite the fact that a handful of questions cannot provide very extensive and detailed information about the preferences of the people that chose to reply to them, the postal survey does have the virtue of reaching a lot of people. As for the Citizen's Councils, this instrument involves the participation of a small number of people picked at random, but it does have the advantage of giving the participants the opportunity to receive information and deliberate among themselves in order to take the most well-founded and reasoned decision possible. Thus, one mechanism seems to provide "quantity", while the other provides "quality". So, to what extent does the difference in the results respond to the different nature of both participatory instruments?

In the following sections we shall examine what the postal survey and the Councils actually consisted of in order to observe and analyse their results at the end and attempt to respond to the question we asked at the start: Do different participatory methods produce coherent results?

The postal survey

As we mentioned in the introduction the postal survey, along with the Citizen's Councils, made up one of the pieces of the survey for the revision of the GUDP. The aim of the survey was to get to know the opinion of as many people as possible on the suggested criteria underlying the new Plan.

The survey was drawn up in October and anyone living in the town over the age of 16 could reply to it. The questions revolved around the two main themes of the survey: the desired population growth of the town and the urban planning model to be followed. There were also questions to find out about the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants (sex, age, level of studies and other details).

An introductory letter to the campaign *What do we want Cardedeu to be like?* and three copies of the survey were sent to all the households of the municipality (4,262), based on the information in the census that the Council provided to the technical organising team. In the letter it was also indicated that in the event of the family unit containing more than three people with the right to reply to the survey, they could obtain more copies at the Town Council offices. Furthermore, a contact number and e-mail address were

¹ Apart from these two mechanisms, the local television and other media provided a great deal of advanced information, via a special programme whose purpose was two-fold: to publicise the project of citizen participation in general and to facilitate information so that the citizens could reply to the postal survey with full knowledge of what was at stake. The programmes showed interviews with architects, teachers, local municipal bodies, members of the political parties represented on the Town Council and members of the organising team who commented on the phases of development of the process.

Furthermore, during the process of citizen consultation, help was also provided by the Cardedeu On-Line Club, a non-profit organisation whose main aim is to promote the use and application of Internet and the new technologies in all the fields and activities of the municipality. The Cardedeu On-Line Club played its part by preparing and managing a web site containing information on the process, the urban planning situation of the municipality and the possibility to participate in a virtual debate on the subject.

provided in order to receive more information and clear up any doubts². Those interested in taking part in the survey were given from the 2nd of November until the 26th of November to return the completed questionnaires in the special boxes located in all the bakeries, cake shops and chemist's in the town, or directly at the Town Hall.

The number of surveys gathered far exceeded the initial forecasts. In total, 989 questionnaires were returned, representing 9.5% of the population over the age of 16. Despite the fact that the survey brochure stated that only residents of Cardedeu could answer, we cannot tell how many may have been filled in by non-residents. However, to avoid this happening, an effort was made to check the number of copies distributed: only three were sent to each household of the town and if more were needed, they had to be requested from the technical organisation team and collected from the Town Council³.

The Citizen's Councils

The Citizen's Councils are a mechanism for citizen participation in the taking of public decisions. Simplifying a great deal we could say that it is a procedure similar to people's juries in Courts of Law, but oriented towards the taking of a municipal decision. As in juries, a group of people chosen at random listened to different "witnesses" (political actors, technicians from the Administration and independent experts) and received information from several different sources. They then debated among themselves to take a resolution, which in this case would be a policy proposal for the institution that has proposed it.

The Councils are made up of people who are asked their opinion on a specific question. It does not therefore concern people with specific knowledge, or an especially direct involvement on the subject to be debated and decided upon. These people are picked at random from among the adult population in the territory affected by the resolution to be taken, through one or other normal sampling techniques. This randomness should act as a guarantee of plurality of opinions and interests.

Furthermore, taking part in Councils implies a full-time dedication during the days that the process lasts. When the meetings go on for several days, the participation is financially rewarded. In the case of Cardedeu, the organising team set up a compensatory payment structure based on a basic payment of 5,000 pesetas a day, which could be increased to a maximum of 10,000 if the participant could give proof of higher wage levels. The purpose of this payment was to guarantee that anyone chosen to take part could do so, and therefore, to avoid the social biases –of over-representation of men, for example - that we find in most instruments of citizen participation.

During the holding of the Councils there were two clearly differentiated phases. The first phase is given over to debate and information. It consists of making it possible for the participants to have the necessary information on the subject concerned by the decision so that they can deliberate among themselves. This first phase is essentially collective and is co-ordinated through small groups, better suited than large ones in order to avoid "stage fright", domination or excessive leadership.

After this information and deliberation phase, the Councils enter the second stage, in which they give their opinion and draw up a report. Unlike the previous phase, this is essentially individual: each participant gives his or

² The possibility was also provided to respond to the questionnaire via the web site that the Cardedeu On-Line Club had prepared for the survey.

³ In addition, the Cardedeu On-Line Club also carried out computer checks to prevent the same person replying more than once to the survey on-line.

her opinion by answering a short questionnaire in writing as a kind of survey in which they express their decision on the subject raised.

The organisation of the Councils and the chairing of their sessions normally falls to an external body that guarantees the independence of the process vis a vis the institution ordering it. In the case of Cardedeu, this organisation was led by a technical team made up of members of the Jaume Bofill Foundation and the Policy Analysis Team of the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

The quantitative results of the questionnaire make up the fundamental basis of the report or citizens' opinion provided by the organising team. Furthermore, other information is also taken into consideration derived from observations and recordings of the debate groups. Finally, an initial outline of this report is put to a follow-up committee democratically elected from among the members of the Councils for consideration, in order to guarantee that it does faithfully reflect what the participants wanted to express.

In the Citizens Councils of Cardedeu, the aim was to achieve 75 participants (made up of three groups or Councils of 25 people each) from among those over 16 from the municipal census, using the Pilot Council formula. As usual in this methodology, this council had the additional function of serving as a working test before the other two Councils that were held simultaneously two weeks later. Thus, the recruiting process lasted from mid-October until the end of November.

The first stage in the recruiting process involved sending letters to 348 randomly selected participants and an interview was held with all those who did not reject the proposal, thus achieving the participation of 68 people. Thus, the final rejection rate shows us that for every person that agreed to participate in the Citizens Councils, 4 refused. If we compare this figure with previous experiences held throughout Spain, we can see that the figure is within the average, in a scale in which, for example, at one end we could situate the experience of Idiazábal (Basque Country)- a town with very few inhabitants, it must be said -, where the rejection rate was 1.1. At the other extreme we could situate the first experience of Montornès del Vallès (Catalonia), where the experience was not remunerated and not much effort was put into mobilising the population in the process of recruiting the selected candidates.

Are the results similar or were they very different?

The results⁴ of the postal survey and the Councils show similarities and differences, which in certain cases even send out contradictory messages, whilst in others they only establish nuances in the clarity or intensity of the result. The initial differences already appear when establishing the main urban planning problems of the municipality: the postal survey shows us a more plural and fragmented panorama with a multitude of relevant subjects, while the Councils point to a scenario dominated by two or three main problems. Thus, in the case of the postal survey the data point to the urban planning problems most often cited (see table 1), the excessive motor vehicle traffic flowing through Cardedeu, followed by the problems related to mobility of vehicles, and the lack of amenities. The "others" category⁵ also receives a high percentage of responses (in fact, it appears as the second most voted category), and confirms the greatest variety of responses to us

⁴ We should bear in mind, however, that we can only compare the results of those questions that were worded in the same or a very similar way in both mechanisms.

⁵ Within the "others" category we find problems such as, for example, the need to locate industries far from the town centre, covering the railway line and enlarging the station car park, resolving the shortcomings of public transport suffered by the municipality, building more aesthetically pleasing houses and renovating existing ones, or providing more cycle tracks.

when identifying the main urban planning problems of the municipality. So, apart from the question of motor vehicle traffic, there is no single group that concentrates a high number of responses in a specific group of categories and these are spread very evenly over a series of problems that are considered very important.

As to the responses of the participants in the Councils (see table 2), here we find that nearly everyone has mentioned amenities among the main problems, while there were some categories of responses that were not chosen by anyone. In any case, the main problems indicated by one or other method do not change radically. Traffic is most clearly the main concern of those who responded to the questionnaire, while amenities were the main subject in the Councils. And three of the four main subjects coincide in both mechanisms.

Table 1. Main urban planning problems of Cardedeu according to the participants in the survey⁶.

Categories	Percentage represented by each category over the total of responses obtained (3 responses per participant at most)
Excess of motor vehicle traffic flowing through the municipality	40.0
Others	35.1
Problems related to vehicle traffic	31.8
Lack of amenities	28.6
Excessive growth of the municipality	25.7
Problems of mobility for people	20.0
Lack of preservation of public areas and insufficient cleaning of the streets	15.9
Lack of green areas and natural spaces	15.7
Insufficient street lighting	14.4
Excessively high buildings	7.1
Problems related to access to housing	4.7
Lack of shops	4.2
Don't know/Didn't answer	19.5
TOTAL	262.6

Source: own figures

⁶ The problems are ordered on the grounds of the percentage represented by each category over the total of responses obtained.

Table 2. Main urban planning problems of Cardedeu according to the participants in the Councils⁷.

Categories	Percentage represented by each category over the total of responses obtained (3 responses per participant at most)
Lack of amenities	80.6
Excessive growth of the municipality	55.2
Excess of motor vehicle traffic flowing through the municipality	49.3
Lack of green areas and natural spaces	29.9
Problems related to vehicle traffic	22.4
Lack of preservation of public spaces and insufficient cleaning of the streets	19.4
Problems of mobility for people	16.4
Problems related to access to housing	10.4
Excessively high buildings	7.5
Lack of shops	7.5
Others	1.5
Insufficient street lighting	-
Don't know/Didn't answer	-
TOTAL	300.0

Source: own figures

In fact, in this case we can start to offer explanations of the differences. Even though we cannot rule out the possibility that some are caused by the effect of a different make-up of the two groups, most probably there are two main reasons for these changes. The main one is purely a matter of the format of the question: in the postal survey there was one open question in which everyone answered the first thing that came to mind without a list of problems to choose from. Meanwhile, in the Councils the participants worked with the list drawn up on the basis of the responses provided in the survey. We know that the format of the questions leads to different responses, without it being possible to say with any certainty that some are better than others. The responses to the open question are more spontaneous and, therefore, a more faithful reflection of the everyday concerns of the inhabitants of Cardedeu. But if we accept that the other is an extremely complete and exhaustive list of problems, we could think that this has allowed some participants to bear in mind problems which in the other scenario would not have occurred to them.

The other reason could be the subjects discussed in the Councils. Amenities, although not a leading subject, were a part of the questions discussed and were also covered in the presentations and debates. On the other hand, this hardly happens with the subjects of mobility, which confirms the central nature and the perception of relevance of the first subject. In any case, the disparities here are not problematic, both because of the more generic nature of the question and because they do not show a radically different outlook.

Another of the questions that was asked both to the participants of the postal survey and to those of the Councils, revolved around the measures that should be taken in relation to the growth of the population of the municipality. Should Cardedeu be allowed to grow freely or should this growth be controlled and even limited? On this subject, the participants of both methods send out an unmistakable message speaking out against

⁷ The problems appear ordered on the grounds of the percentage represented by each category over the total of responses obtained.

unlimited growth of the town. However, despite this initial similarity, we can also appreciate certain differences of intensity, with the participants of the survey more critical of the growth of the municipality and showing greater support for radically limiting it, while the participants of the Councils do not reject the possibility of growth as long as it is controlled (see table 3).

Table 3. If you think about what you would like Cardedeu to be like in a few years, what do you think should be done about the growth of the population of the municipality?

	% responses of the participants in the postal survey	% responses of the participants in the Councils
Measures should be taken to stop Cardedeu growing any bigger	42.9	16.2
The municipality should be allowed to grow, but up to a limit, and this should be monitored	52.3	82.4
No limits should be imposed on the growth of Cardedeu	4.5	1.5
Don't know/Didn't answer	0.2	-

Source: own figures

Another question under debate was the order of priorities that should be established when deciding the different uses of space: use for amenities, farming and livestock raising activities, location of industries, housing and natural spaces. When we analyse the responses that the participants of each mechanism provide to this question, we can see that the message sent out is extremely uniform to the extent that in both cases the highest priority is given to amenities, followed by uses for natural spaces (see table 4). Therefore, people want to increase the area given over to amenities, at the expense of any other use than natural spaces.

Table 4. Which of the following land uses do you feel should NOT be reduced.

	% responses of the participants in the postal survey	% responses of the participants in the Councils
Amenities	50.5	52.9
Natural spaces	36.4	30.9
Farming and livestock raising activities	6.5	7.4
Location of industries	3.7	2.9
Housing	2.7	1.5
Don't know/Didn't answer	.2	4.4

Source: own figures

Another of the questions in the survey revolved around how this distribution of land uses should be made: the idea was to find out if the inhabitants of the municipality support a greater mix of uses of space, or if on the contrary they prefer a model of urban growth based on zoning, on the segregation of the area into clearly delimited sectors on the grounds of the type of land use decided for each zone. However, in order to word the question without entering into technical jargon and to make it understandable for everyone, the question was asked in a somewhat simplified way so that it was only possible to choose between two types of ideal place of residence, which would cover the idea of an opposition between mixed uses/zoning. Thus, the choice was between exclusively residential districts, which have the advantage of peace but the disadvantage of having a lack of shops and other services nearby, and districts where the houses share the land with shops and amenities. In this last case, there is an increase in accessibility to the establishments that

provide all such services, but a reduction in the peace and quiet provided by living far from the centre of the municipality. And it is when we analyse the results to this question, when the differences between postal survey and Councils start to become more pronounced. The participants in the survey generally support an urban planning model based on zoning, quiet residential districts even though this means not being close to shops and other services. On the other hand, the participants in the Councils are more in favour of the mixture of uses of the land and defend the existence of neighbourhoods with shops and services although they are less peaceful (see table 5).

Table 5. If you could choose your ideal place of residence, which of the following options would you choose?

	% responses of the participants in the postal survey	% responses of the participants in the Councils
I would like to live in a peaceful residential area even if I had to travel to do the shopping or have access to other services of the municipality	60.2	30.9
I would like to live near the shops and other services even if it meant living in a less peaceful environment	37.4	66.2
Don't know/Didn't answer	2.4	2.9

Source: own figures

Finally, another of the main questions in the survey concerned the type of housing that people would prefer to have built in Cardedeu: single family type housing, two or three storey buildings of flats, or buildings with more storeys. In this case, we once again see the differences in the responses of the participants in one mechanism and the other. Even if everyone coincided in rejecting tall buildings, in the Councils the main inclination is towards blocks of flats with few storeys (63%), while in the survey, there is much less support for these (31%), with many more in favour of single family housing (see table 6).

Table 6. In relation to the type of housing that you think should be built in Cardedeu, which of the following options do you prefer?

	% responses of the participants in the postal survey	% responses of the participants in the Councils
I think that single family type housing should mainly be built	64.0	35.3
I think that most of all there should be blocks of flats with very few storeys	30.9	63.2
I think that they should generally build blocks of flats a little higher	3.8	-
Don't know/Didn't answer	1.3	1.5

Source: own figures

In sum, when we compare the results of one mechanism with the other we find certain similarities. We have already seen that differences in nuance when identifying the main urban planning problems of the municipality were not problematic. And the order of preferences on land uses was practically the same in the postal survey and in the Councils. However, the disparities begin to emerge when we ask the participants which measures should be taken on the growth of the population of the municipality: despite the fact that the participants of both methods sent out a clear message against

unlimited growth, they do not reach any agreement on the degree of limitation, and some prefer a more “hard-line” limitation (survey) and others a “softer” one (Councils). And these differences in the results become much more acute when we analyse the responses of the participants to how they would like the distribution of land use (preferably mixed or preferably zoned) and the typology of housing that should especially be built there. So, in both cases the order of preferences is inverted and we find that the participants in the postal survey incline towards zoning and single family type housing, while the participants in the Councils opt in the main for the mix of land uses and buildings with few storeys.

Why were some of the results different?

In order to answer this question, we must consider the different nature of each consultation mechanism. As we have already seen, each instrument has certain characteristics that lead it to offer a different set of advantages and disadvantages. We can therefore say that the two reflect two real different voices that exist in the municipality and that it is important to know what each one wishes to say.

The survey is a consultation mechanism with two clear advantages. On the one hand, it allows us to access a much higher number of participants than the Councils (974 to 68) whilst it also makes it possible to gather the opinions of those who are more eager or willing to have their opinions heard. On the other hand, it is a “purer” reflection of the opinion of the inhabitants of Cardedeu as we find them in their genuine state, that is, as it appears if we ask people in the street or as they walk their children to school, with no type of filters or external intervention. It is evident that the problems of the Citizen's Councils are exactly the other side of this coin: there are few participants and from the moment they have lived through the experience, they stop being people representative of the municipality, in the same way that local leaders of one sort or another are not representative in this sense either, since they have access to a block of information which is not usual in the population as a whole.

On the other hand, the Councils also show clear advantages. The first is their greater potential of representativeness. Those who received the survey were a good snapshot of Cardedeu, but those who actually responded were not so much, because a whole group of factors (interest, experience...) meant that not all the different social groups responded with the same intensity. Neither are the participants in the Councils a perfect snapshot of the municipality, in that we do not know for certain whether those who refused to take part in them are the same as those who accepted to do so (even though we suspect this is not the case). But, given that the survey was answered by 1 out of 10 people that received it, while one out of every four people invited to take part in the Councils accepted, this leads us to think that even though this was less, it is likely that the participants in the Councils were a more faithful representation of the population over 16 than those who replied to the questionnaire. But the main difference is that the participants in the Councils met for two and a half days, listening and talking on the subject, which means that they have a degree of information and reflection much higher than those people that answered the questionnaire.

In the main, and aside from secondary factors such as the possible changes related to the format of the questions, there would be two main types of explanations of why the results are different. The first possibility is that we are looking at two different groups of people and that the different make-ups of the two groups also give rise to preferences that do not always coincide. The second is that the differences can be put down to the process

of taking part in the Councils itself and to having been exposed to the information and debates that took place there.

In order to examine the importance of these two possibilities we have two types of information available. Firstly, we can compare the profiles of the people who responded to the questionnaire with those who participated in the Councils and with those who refused to take part in them. We could think that, given the method used to select the candidates to participate in the Councils, the sum of the participants with those who did not answer should represent very faithfully the real profile of the population of the municipality. Given that the profiles in terms of sex are very similar, we shall concentrate on the other three data available: age, level of studies completed and period of residence in the municipality.

Reading table 7 leads us to affirm that the profiles of the participants in the two mechanisms present certain significant differences which in some cases point to major deficits of representativeness of the participants in the Councils and others in the survey. For example, the representation in terms of ages is better in the case of the survey because the greater effort required to take part in the Councils became an insurmountable barrier for older people, who were not well-represented in this mechanism. On the other hand, despite the fact that the participants in both mechanisms have an educational profile higher than the average in the municipality, the Council's efforts to mobilise people meant that their participants do not represent such a biased sample as that shown by the survey. For example, 3 out of 4 of those who replied had completed at least their secondary school education, when this group does not represent even half of the municipality.

The analysis of the period of residence provides us with additional information. In the Councils there seemed to be a certain under-representation of those residents who had come to the town over the last 10 years. On the other hand, the survey received a broad level of response among those who had spent less time living in Cardedeu.

Table 7. Age, studies, districts of residence and time of residence of those who answer the survey and of those who accept and refuse to participate in the Councils (vertical %)

	Survey	Participants in Councils	Refused to participate
16-19 years	5.8	10.4	6.0
20-29	13.6	13.4	13.8
30-39	27.8	28.4	25.0
40-49	24.1	29.9	11.2
50-59	11.9	13.4	16.4
60 years and over	16.8	4.5	27.6
Primary school studies not completed	4.5	5.9	23.1
Primary school studies	21.9	36.8	40.2
Secondary school studies	33.8	32.4	21.4
University studies	39.8	25.0	15.4
Born in Cardedeu	23.6	36.8	-
Less than 10 years	38.6	20.6	-
More than 10 years	37.8	41.2	-

Source: own figures

In sum, despite the fact that the participants in the Councils present a slightly more faithful sample of the population of the municipality, especially in terms of their cultural level, the overall differences between one method

and the other are not overwhelming nor do they always point in the same direction. In order to explain some of the differences that we mentioned in the previous section, the greater presence in the Councils of people born in Cardedeu or who have lived there longer could be part of the explanation of their tendency to support this participatory mechanism for an urban planning model with houses with few storeys and with a predominance of districts with shops and services.

The other possibility to explore is that of changes in opinion as a result of the participation in the Councils. We have some very useful information to respond to this question, given that before the holding of Councils 2 and 3, and when we started to observe that the result of Council 1 did not coincide with the result of the surveys, we chose to do a very short telephone questionnaire with the future participants in Councils 2 and 3 and therefore see if their participation in the Councils changed their preferences⁸. Specifically, two questions were asked on the urban planning model (type of distribution of land use and desired typology of housing) and one on population growth, always with the same format as the questions that had to be replied to in the survey and the Councils.

Table 8. Results of three questions in the postal survey and among the participants of groups 2 and 3 and before and after the holding of the Councils

	Survey	Telephone survey (groups 2 and 3)	Councils (groups 2 and 3)
Stop Cardedeu growing	42.9	16.7	9.3
Limited growth	52.3	81.0	88.4
Set no limits	4.5	2.4	2.3
Peaceful residential neighbourhoods	60.2	50.0	32.6
Neighbourhoods with shops and services	37.4	40.5	65.1
Single family houses	64.0	52.4	37.2
Blocks of flats with few storeys	30.9	45.2	60.5
Slightly higher blocks of flats	3.8	2.4	-

Source: own figures

What has happened? Once again a little of everything. That is, in some questions the differences occur between the postal and telephone surveys, indicating that these differences are due to the make-up of the samples, whilst in other cases the change occurs totally or fundamentally between the telephone survey and the one after the Council, indicating that significant changes in opinion occurred during the Council.

The first is the case of the question on population growth. The absolute predominance of the moderate stance expressed in the Councils was already clear among the participants before the sessions began. We cannot rule out the possibility that this is an effect of their intended participation, so that, as they were aware that they were to take an active role in an intense process of reflection, they had already decided to opt for a more moderate and/or thoughtful stance than when simply replying to the survey. But in any case the difference cannot be explained away as a result of the running of Councils themselves.

⁸ This was an option with a certain risk attached, in that there was a danger that people might wish to appear consistent with opinions already expressed and therefore, once they had answered certain questions they may explicitly refuse to change their opinions. As we shall see, this danger did not lead to any clear result, in that in some subjects there was a change of perception.

On the other hand, in the two questions on the urban planning model, there is a change of attitude by the participants in the Councils, between the week before they took part and the day they finished. In fact, the inversion of stances that occurs on the subject of the type of neighbourhoods is fundamentally due to this change, while in the case of the type of housing it was already a question of a sample with different and better-balanced predisposition, that also ended up opting for houses with few storeys as a result of their exposure to the Councils.

Thus, in the subject on which the postal survey and Councils showed greater divergences, these occurred to a large extent as a result of a change of stance of the participants in the Councils, who before they took part were more in favour of a town model closer to that projected by the surveys, changing their opinions as a result of the information and debates that took place in the Councils. Therefore, the evaluation of the working of the Councils and of their agenda became a key element to conduct one or other reading of this subject: either we consider that the participants were manipulated by some biased contents or else we believe that they changed their mind as a result of more complete information after deeper reflection. We at least tend very clearly towards the second option.

Conclusions

Without a doubt, from the methodological point of view, the combination of two participatory mechanisms in a process of consultation such as that applied in Cardedeu was one of the main attractions of the project, and the one that made it clearly innovative. Thus, the political decision-makers of the Council could get an initial impression of the general opinion of a very large number of people on the desired urban evolution of the town, and at the same they could also complete this initial vision with the details provided by a smaller group that had had more time and information to think about them and discuss them.

But the disadvantages of combining two participatory instruments were also clear: results that are too similar could put us in mind of a reiterative and artificially complex process, while very discordant results created the problem of which voice to listen to. The final product is closer to this second scenario, with great similarities but also disagreements on a basic theme such as the urban planning model. However, despite the difficulties in interpretation that this involves, we believe that the overall balance is positive and that the use of both instruments improves the results more than it complicates them. The exclusive use of the two mechanisms would have provided us with a less “problematic” message, but also a more incomplete one. Now it is clearer that the initial reaction of the citizens of Cardedeu is to opt for a peaceful municipality with single family housing, but that when they have sufficient information and time to think, the majority is inclined towards a slightly different model of municipality. On the other hand, we should not forget that, despite some disagreements that could be seen as extremely enriching, the participants in both mechanisms sent very clear and unmistakable messages: the participants in the postal survey and the Councils generally declared themselves to be against high blocks of flats, unlimited growth and appear to favour the construction of new amenities and to defend natural areas within the municipal area.

So, despite the risks that can flow from the use of different participatory methodologies for the same decision, we feel that the advantages are greater. Firstly, the application of various mechanisms can allow us to have a better idea of what the citizens want on a given subject. It can also allow the involvement of more people in the process of drawing up a public policy and increase its degree of legitimacy. But in addition to that, a possible lack

of coincidence in the results should not necessarily be seen as contradictory. In fact, this apparent lack of coherence is a reflection of the co-existence of different realities and scenarios that must equally be taken into account by politicians when they have to take a decision.

It will not always be possible to use complementary methodologies, but in any case the lesson is that we must then be very aware of the possible biases that we introduce when we opt for one mechanism or another. In the same way that we know that electoral systems are not neutral and favour or prejudice certain parties, we must bear in mind that the choice of one methodology will also have effects on the potential result of the process.