Mayors facing local government reforms: From municipal organization leadership to public management transformation processes

Los alcaldes ante las reformas del gobierno local: Del liderazgo de la organización municipal a los procesos de transformación de la gestión pública

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Abstract

Local public authorities have traditionally been an area for experimenting with reforms of varying impact for the overall institutional framework. In implementing these reforms, a prominent part has been taken by mayors in their role as the highest-ranking officials in their organisations. This article reports evidence for, and reflects on, the connection between the figure of the Spanish mayor (in the way mayors perceive their own role) and their relations with both the municipal governments they head and the processes of transformation to which these governments are exposed. Based on data obtained from the project entitled "Political Leaders in European Cities", concerned with identifying mayors' attitudes towards several aspects of local government, this article develops its argument in two stages. In the first stage, we describe the profiles of Spanish mayors, with a prime focus on how they perceive their functions and the importance they attach to their role as managers of the local authority. In the second stage, we analyze the connection between these perceptions and the relations the mayors establish with the local authority (that is, the relations between politicians and public executives and governmental employees). Finally, based on the classifications made, the positions taken up by mayors in relation to various processes of government reform are determined. The conclusions allow for various scenarios of administrative reform to be established

based on the degree of involvement of the respective mayors, and they also point to further lines of research.

Keywords: local government, mayors, public management, government reform, administrative reform, local reforms, outsourcing, inter-municipal cooperation.

Resumen

Las Administraciones públicas locales han sido tradicionalmente un espacio de experimentación de reformas de diverso calado en cuanto a su incidencia en el marco institucional general. En la puesta en práctica de estas reformas, los alcaldes han desempeñado un papel destacado como responsables de mayor rango en sus organizaciones. El artículo aporta evidencias y reflexiona sobre la conexión entre la figura del alcalde español (en la forma en que ellos conciben su propio papel) y sus relaciones tanto con el Gobierno municipal que dirige como con los procesos de transformación a los que dichos gobiernos están expuestos. A partir de los datos obtenidos del proyecto «Líderes políticos en ciudades europeas» sobre percepciones de los alcaldes respecto de varios aspectos del gobierno local, este artículo desarrolla su argumento en dos estadios. En el primer estadio identificamos los perfiles de los alcaldes españoles atendiendo especialmente a cómo perciben su rol y a la importancia que otorgan a su actividad de dirección de la autoridad local. En el segundo estadio analizamos la conexión entre estas percepciones y las relaciones que establecen los alcaldes con la autoridad local (es decir, las relaciones entre políticos y directivos y empleados públicos). Por último, y a partir de las clasificaciones realizadas, se determinan las posiciones adoptadas por los alcaldes en relación con diferentes procesos de reforma del Gobierno. Las conclusiones permiten establecer diversos escenarios de reforma administrativa basados en la implicación de los respectivos alcaldes, y también se apuntan líneas de investigación adicionales.

Palabras clave: gobierno local, alcaldes, gestión pública, reforma del gobierno, reforma administrativa, reformas locales, externalización, cooperación inter-municipal.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, local government has shown itself to be a fertile field to put into practice innovative experiments in public management and administration, as is evidenced by an extensive literature of case studies (see, among others, Cochrane, 1991; Davis, 1998; Hendricks and Tops, 2005; Ihrke *et al.*, 2003; Kersting and Vetter, 2003; Tat-Kei Ho, 2002). Broadly speaking, these innovative processes have been instigated in response to the combined effects of citizen pressure and a need to optimize management in resource-limited settings. Partly because of this, innovations at local level have impacted areas such as the promotion of citizen participation or interactive decision-making aimed at encouraging the involvement of individual citizens and associations in decision-making on matters of general interest (for a review of such innovations, see Salvador and Ramió, 2011; Bassoli, 2010; Bherer, 2010; Geurtz

and Van de Wijdeven, 2010; Simmons and Birchall, 2005; Cheyne and Comrie, 2002). But they have also impacted processes aimed at improving the provision of services to citizens (Torres and Pina, 2002; Baldersheim and Wollmann, 2006), especially through the contracting out of public service delivery (Salvador and Riba, 2015). Both lines of reform require, of course, substantial changes in the internal organization of the local authorities that seek to address them.

At the outset of these processes of transformation, the relations between mayors and the professionals that make up local public authorities —which are portrayed in academic debates as a relationship between politicians and civil servants— are especially relevant (Ramió, 2012; Alba and Navarro, 2006).

Moreover, the role played by the highest-ranking political figure, namely the mayor, is critical in the promotion and implementation of these and other local government reforms. However, given the rich diversity of municipalities as well as of mayors' political profiles, the stances taken by the mayors in response to any given reform can vary from mere permissiveness to a full and effective involvement throughout the phases of the process. Egner and Heinelt draw the following distinction —one to which we will return later— between the 'inward' and the 'outward' looking political leader according to "the degree to which a mayor is involved in the daily administrative organization" (2006: 336). Indeed, the aim of this article is to report evidence for, and to reflect on, the connection between the figure of the Spanish mayor and the way they perceive their functions and, in particular, the importance they attach to questions related to the management of the public authority they lead.

Our research question link two aspects, namely the relationship mayors maintain with the professionals of the local public sector and the formers' perception of their role, with mayors' attitudes towards different local government reform processes. These reforms include changes in the relations between the government and its broader environment (ranging from democratic renewal to processes of functional re-scaling, including greater citizen involvement and democratic participation) and changes in the internal organization of the local government (ranging from the reform of human resource management to restructuring processes) (Bouckaert and Kuhlmann, 2016). We explore the link between mayors' role within the public administration and their position on the content and scope of government reforms.

The rest of this article is structured in five sections. The next one outlines the analytical framework adopted, providing a brief definition of the key concepts and identifying the hypothetical relations established. In the following section, we present the statistical operationalization of the variables associated with each concept (based on those included in the study "Political Leaders in European Cities", about mayors' attitudes towards Sever all aspects of local government) and we also describe the methodology employed in our analysis. Section four presents and discusses the results before proceeding to the validation of the hypotheses. The last section concludes by identifying the main contributions of the study and future lines of research regarding where mayors stand in relation to local government reform.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: POLITICAL-ADMINISTRATIVE RELATIONS
AND MAJOR REFORMS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Any analysis of the standpoint taken by mayors on local government reform is
closely linked to the academic debate concerning the distribution of roles and func-
tions between mayors —as political figures— and the professionals of local adminis-
tration —executives and civil servants— and the relations between them (Ramió,
2012; Alba and Navarro, 2006).

The actual model of local government is a critical variable to consider in the rela-
tions between mayors and local administrators (Sancino and Turrini, 2009). In this
regard, Spain is characterized by the figure of the "strong mayor", a system rooted in
the politico-administrative tradition of continental Europe (*Rechtsstaat*) and the
Napoleonic model (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002). In analyzing the effective function-
ing of these models, some authors have called into question the strict separation of
responsibilities between both types of actors in the public policy-making process
(Zhang and Feiock, 2009), but also in the adoption of innovations at the local level
(Korac *et al.*, 2016). Although innovations —and reforms— can emerge from differ-
ent organizational levels and they are not inherent to the political or administrative
spheres (Borins, 2014), those who occupy key positions in formal decision-making
processes are critical for promoting them (Considine and Lewis, 2007). This interac-
tion is especially relevant in local public authorities where the political and adminis-
trative spheres are closely interwoven, with political leaders assuming administrative
functions and public managers who are never fully depoliticized (Mouritzen and
Svara, 2002; Avellaneda, 2012).

One of the dimensions in this interaction between the political and administrative
levels is reflected in mayors' assumption of their role, implementation of their func-
tions, and their management and control of the municipal authority. The exercise of
these functions is especially evident in local governments characterized by a "strong
mayor", which is the case in Spain (Morgan and Watson, 1992; Korac *et al.*, 2016).
But this assumption of roles is also conditioned by the great diversity of political pro-
files at the local level and by the different vocations to implement functions that cor-
respond, in varying degrees, to the internal management of the local public authority.
These profiles have been usefully analyzed by applying the concepts of "inward look-
ing" vs. "outward looking" local political leader (Egner and Heinelt, 2006). Mayors
corresponding to the first profile ("inward looking") assume functions associated with
the internal management of the local authority, including the definition of goals of
organisational reform, the management of public resources and services and, gener-
ally, all aspects related to the operation of the municipal authority.

The interaction between mayors and public executives and administrators, as well
as the role that the former play in leading and managing the municipal authority are
made clear, among other things, in their attitudes towards processes of administra-
tive reform.

Several comparative studies of local administrative reform highlight a number of key areas where these transformations tend to converge (Bouckaert and Kuhlmann, 2016; Korac *et al.*, 2016). Among the most important ones are:

1) Internal transformations of municipal organization and management. Although initially (in the 1990s) many of these changes were inspired by the New Public Management model, their actual impact on local government in continental Europe was minor and, in any case, they did not result in any radical transformations (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011; Kuhlmann and Wollmann, 2014). In fact, these internal changes were adapted to the different politico-administrative traditions and contexts (Peters, 2013; Ramió and Salvador, 2012). As for their actual content, these transformations had to do with the introduction of new working methods and new management techniques that result in the reorganization of structures, processes and the management of both human resources and the budget. In short, they constitute either "managerial reforms" (Bouckaert and Kuhlmann, 2016) or "organizational innovations" (Korac *et al.*, 2016).

2) Models of service delivery and the implementation of public policies; that is, service innovations and external reorganizations, including networking with external agents. Public-private collaboration and the outsourcing of services to both for-profit and non-profit providers also fall under these transformations of local public management (Torres and Pina, 2002; Baldersheim and Wollmann, 2006; Ramió and Salvador, 2012; Salvador and Riba, 2015). This areas also include the review of procedures for the outsourcing and remunicipalization of local public services, albeit more recently and in a more incipient manner (Hefetz and Warner, 2004; Wollmann and Marcou, 2010; Wollmann, 2013).

3) Distribution of competencies and functions between levels of government and between authorities. The concept of "territorial re-scaling" (Bouckaert and Kuhlmann, 2016) includes transformations that have tended to maintain the highly fragmented structure of local authorities through the creation of institutions at the intermediate level, which provide them with support and ensure their continuing viability; this is typical of the so-called "Southern European reform model", where the Spanish case belongs (Baldersheim and Rose, 2010)–Kuhlmann and Wollmann (2014) include inter-municipal bodies within territorial reforms. In this sense, inter-municipal cooperation often emerges as an interesting alternative to offset the problems due to size (Hulst and Van Montfort, 2007; Teles, 2014) that are otherwise dealt with by either municipal mergers or the outsourcing of services (Warner and Hebdon, 2001; Warner, 2006).

The following sections analyze Spanish mayors' perceptions of these major axes of administrative reform. In turn, we undertake a review of the standpoints adopted by the mayors in relation to their intervention in the structure and planning of local

government. Our hypotheses pose that inward-looking mayors and their ideological perceptions will influence of the extent to which they are concerned with reforms related to municipal management, public service delivery, the distribution of competences and inter-municipal cooperation. Finally, we seek possible relationships between these standpoints and mayors' preferences concerning interventions in the organization of the authority. In terms of hypotheses, this could be specified as follows:

H_1: "Inward looking mayors tend to be more concerned with municipal management".

H_2: "Choices about public service delivery will be affected by the mayor's ideological perceptions".

H_3: "Inter-municipal cooperation perceptions will be influenced by the mayor's profile in terms of ideological issues and inward-looking role".

Hypothesis number 1 is aimed at testing the consistency of the classification while hypotheses number 2 and 3 explore the connections between mayors' profile and two different kinds of local government reforms.

MAYORS' PERCEPTIONS OF MAJOR REFORMS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

This section aims to explore the standpoints adopted by Spain's mayors in relation to the main lines of reform that have been adopted within the European context. The data used in this article come from the second round of the "Political Leaders in European Cities" survey (2015-16), which sought to study the role of mayors and the transformation of political representation at the local level in several European countries. Specifically, we use the subset of data that correspond to Spain. The survey took responses from mayors elected in municipalities larger than 10 000 inhabitants. The original size of the sample was 752 mayors (all municipalities beyond that population threshold), and the actual responses amounted to 303, which yields a response rate of 40 %. Despite the low response rate, the final sample is rather representative of the universe both, in terms of territorial distribution and gender and, therefore, we do not expect the results to be biased due to unbalanced response rate.

MAYORS AND THE INTERNAL MANAGEMENT OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT: ORGANIZATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES

The figure of the mayor in Spain, both in the legislation and in its characterization in the literature, is a unique figure in the political system, granted specific powers for the management and planning of the organizational structure of the municipality. Indeed, as an example, article 21 of the *ley de bases* (Basic Principles of Local Government 7/1985) which defines the functions of the mayor, includes tasks of a marked organizational nature —such as the general leadership of the municipal government

and administration, and more specifically "to act as head of all government personnel, with responsibility for all staff appointments and imposition of sanctions, including the removal of local civil servants from office and the dismissal of members of the workforce". Moreover, this role as head of all government personnel falls within the tasks deemed non-delegable to other bodies.

The questionnaire administered to the mayors included several questions related to their internal management functions. Thus, they were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with various statements regarding measures for the monitoring of the municipal activity. Mayors responded on a Likert-type scale where a value of one corresponded to a position of strong disagreement and a value of five corresponded to the highest level of agreement. Table 1 shows the main descriptive statistics and reveals that mayors agreed with most of the options presented to them. The mean responses to the first two statements regarding the effectiveness of internal target agreements and internal reporting systems stand out as being particularly high. Indeed, the mean score is higher than four in both cases, a finding that is confirmed if we observe the distribution of values: 269 out of 299 mayors "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the first statement as did 273 out of 298 in the case of the second statement.

Table 1.

Extent to which mayors agree with the effectiveness of several internal management measures

	Nº	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Internal target agreements contribute to a more effective management	299	1	5	4.21	.665
Internal reporting systems contribute to better departmental management	298	2	5	4.22	.607
Selection and systematic training of future managers is a permanent task	298	1	5	3.69	.785
Workers' performance appraisals are linked with significant performance-related pay or bonuses	298	1	5	3.12	.911

Thus, mayors value very highly both the effectiveness of internal target agreements and internal reporting systems for ensuring better management. In contrast, their responses to the two statements related to human resource management, that is, the selection and training of managers and workers' performance appraisals, are more tempered. Likewise, it is interesting to note mayors' responses to questions about intervention measures in the internal operation of local government and which have a particular impact on aspects of human resource management. Table 2 shows the results obtained in response to some of these statements. In this case, the mayors were asked about how they would define some of the changes that had occurred over the

previous decade —specifically, the rationalization of the number of employees, public employees' motivations and the general adaptive capacity of the organization. Again, a five-point Likert-type scale was used where a value of one corresponded to a highly negative perception ("intense negative change") and a value of five corresponded to a highly positive perception ("intense positive change").

Table 2.

Evaluation of measures of intervention in the internal operation of the local authority

	Nº	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Rationalization of the number of employees	252	1	5	3.09	1.039
Motivation of local employees	251	1	5	2.98	.963
General adaptive capacity of the organization	252	1	5	3.25	.947

Overall, the results show that mayors have a more negative perception of the instruments directly related to the workforce than they have about the adaptive capacity of the organization. In the economic and political framework of recent years, it is also interesting that they appraise more negatively public employees' motivation than the rationalization of staff numbers which, in general, can be understood to entail a reduction in personnel. Thus, both questions reveal that mayors were, in general, concerned about and attentive to matters involving the internal management of the organization; but they were less so in relation to the elements that have specific consequences for personnel management.

MAYORS AND OUTSOURCING AND/OR REMUNICIPALIZATION

The questionnaire administered to the Spanish mayors included a strategically worded question to determine where they stand in relation to the outsourcing of municipal public services (see results in table 3). Interestingly, a majority of mayors expressed a preference for maintaining the current form of service delivery; a response that is not entirely clear given that it depends on the method of service provision being operated within the municipality. To clarify this situation, the (few) data available on the form of service delivery suggest that the direct provision is the main option for the delivery of most municipal basic services, while outsourcing is reserved to a number of specific areas, in particular, waste collection and water supply (Magre and Pano, 2016).

It is also surprising that the most common preference —and by some distance—, among the mayors wishing to change the service delivery system, is that of reducing outsourcing; this can be interpreted as a wish to increase the direct provision or, what amounts to the same, the remunicipalization of services. This distribution of preferences

Table 3.

The mayors' preferences regarding service delivery

	Frequency	Percentage
My council should increase outsourcing and the privatization of services	36	12.5
My council should reduce outsourcing and the privatization of services	103	35.6
There is no need to change the form of public service delivery	150	51.9
Total	289	100.0

is particularly interesting when analyzed from a temporal perspective and placed within the framework of the changes and reforms over recent years. Again, in the absence of clear data that might allow us to undertake a methodologically rigorous analysis, two elements should be borne in mind. Firstly, the last major reform of the Basic Principles of Local Government (Law 7/1985), which was approved under the title of the Rationalization and Sustainability of Local Government Act (Law 27/2013) in the final days of 2013, did not seem to promote this preference at all. Moreover, in the preamble to the Act, its essential objectives were "to favor private economic initiatives, avoiding disproportionate administrative interventions". Later, in reiterating this line of policy, the legislator stated that by applying this regulation "municipal monopolies inherited from the past and which impede today's thriving economic sectors were to be suppressed". Above and beyond any possible interpretations and alleged problems of constitutionality of some of its precepts, this legislation evidences a clearly different will on the part of the State's higher institutions, and this just a few months before the completion of the field work for this project.

Secondly, Magre and Pano (2016) expressly refer to this matter, but claim not to have any evidence of material changes in the form of management that would suppose a shift from some form of indirect service provision to direct one. The authors claim "remunicipalization does not seem to be gaining ground in Spain", although they go on to say that "in the context of [...] economic crisis: the local government community may begin to show more interest in remunicipalization". In light of the opinions expressed by the mayors, it seems that Spain will once again confirm its habit of being a somewhat late adopter of continental trends as it hitches its wagon to the remunicipalizing tendencies that seem to have taken center stage in the surrounding States. In summary, the mayors' answers are "only" indicative of where they stand on this matter, but they also point to a shift in direction, although we will have to wait and see if and how it manifests itself.

The next two questions asked mayors to state their motives for changing the form of service delivery (in either direction), and again their responses were interesting. Table 4 shows the results; among the most common arguments for changing the

provision of services were the improvement of the service quality and the reduction of costs payable by citizens. The next two motives —greater flexibility from a change in the orientation and greater control over service provision— were much less frequent responses. Service quality is, by far, the main motivation for changing the management system and would seem to be the mayors' main concern when it comes to delivering municipal services. In the next section we explore the possible links between these two questions and the response options.

TABLE 4.

REASONS FOR CHANGING SYSTEM OF SERVICE DELIVERY

	Frequency	Percentage
Quality of service delivery	62	43.1
Costs of service delivery for citizens	39	27.1
Flexibility and change of orientation of service delivery	17	11.8
Control over service delivery	15	10.4
Others	7	4.9
Local authority budget	4	2.8
Total	144	100.0

TABLE 5.

PREFERRED FORM OF DELIVERY BY SERVICE TYPE

	Public-private partnership		Private sector		Public sector		Don't know		Nº
	Nº	%	Nº	%	Nº	%	Nº	%	
Public transport	108	41.7	51	19.7	95	36.7	5	1.9	259
Maintenance of school buildings	38	13.7	29	10.4	209	75.2	2	0.7	278
Waste management	84	29.6	77	27.1	122	43.0	1	0.4	284
Sewage system and water supply	29	10.4	3	1.1	244	87.8	2	0.7	278
Nursing homes for the elderly	70	25.1	13	4.7	194	69.5	2	0.7	279

As for mayors' stand in relation to the delivery of different service types, their preference for the public sector is clearly seen in relation to practically all services except that of public transport where mixed delivery is preferred (table 3). Even in an area that has traditionally been highly permeable to the incorporation of the private

sector, as is the case of waste management, the public sector option is the one preferred by most of the mayors. The preference for the direct provision of sewage systems and water supply is striking (with almost 88 % of the mayors interviewed expressing themselves in favour of public service management). Unfortunately, the questionnaire does not allow us to determine if there are any differences in preference regarding these two services given that in Spain they are managed as independent services. Even so, the results provide a very clear indication of the standpoint taken by the mayors.

MAYORS AND INTER-MUNICIPAL COOPERATION. A TOOL FOR GENERATING SYNERGIES WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION?

Mayors' attitudes towards the formation and operation of amalgamations of local authorities, and the importance they attach to them, have received little attention in the literature. In general, such studies have restricted themselves to examining their cost-related effects (Bel *et al.*, 2013; Bel and Warner, 2015) and, to a lesser degree, the internal operation of these new entities. In Spain, most studies have focused on their evolution, their legal nature and the position they occupy in the broader institutional framework (Martínez-Alonso, 2013; Nieto, 2007). Yet, the inter-municipal cooperation project promoted by a number of international research groups (IMC Project[1]) recognizes the importance of the role played by the mayors in the creation of these entities. Consequently, the standpoint adopted by mayors in relation to them is a key factor in the search for cooperative solutions to municipal problems.

The questionnaire administered to Spanish mayors included several questions dealing with this subject; the one that provides the best outcomes incorporated a set of scenarios and asked the mayors to select the most effective response from inter-municipal cooperation, the amalgamation of municipalities or neither of these two options. Mayors were presented with four scenarios: namely, professionalization and quality of administrative staff; service quality; cost saving and political participation. Although the last scenario falls outside the scope of interest of this article, the results showed in table 6 might be of interest for comparative purposes. As regards the professionalization and quality of staff, the number of mayors who identified cooperation as the most effective method was almost matched by those that considered there was no real utility in either option. In the case of the next two scenarios, however, the mayors showed themselves to be quite strongly in favor of cooperation: more than 65 % of them

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1. A research project led by Filipe Teles (University of Aveiro) and Pawel Swianiewicz (University of Warsaw) within the framework of the COST Action IS1207 Local Public Sector Reforms: An International Comparison. The project has gathered data using a common questionnaire about tools of inter-municipal cooperation in more than a dozen European countries. At the time of writing, its results are in the process of being published.

considered cooperation to be effective for improving service quality and 60 % expressed it to be effective for cutting costs. Yet, mayors showed to be quite sceptical as regards the effectiveness of these measures for promoting political participation.

Table 6.

Perception of the effectiveness of inter-municipal cooperation and amalgamations

	Inter-municipal cooperation is more effective		Amalgamation is more effective		There is no real utility in cooperation or amalgamation		Total	
	Nº	%	Nº	%	Nº	%	Nº	%
Professionalisation and quality of administrative staff	127	45.8	30	10.8	120	43.3	277	100.0
Service quality	180	65.5	43	15.6	52	18.9	275	100.0
Cost saving	168	60.0	90	32.1	22	7.9	280	100.0
Political participation	95	34.3	24	8.7	158	57.0	277	100.0

It is worth highlighting that the amalgamation of municipalities is not chosen as the most effective solution for any of the four scenarios. Even in the case of cost savings, mayors are very clearly in favor of inter-municipal cooperation. While these results are expected, given Spain's traditional tendency towards fragmentation at this level of government rather than taking steps towards a reduction in the number of municipalities, they also reflect a clear line of discourse in relation to this question. Spanish mayors do not even perceive municipal amalgamations as offering an effective method for cutting costs; which is the typical assumption associated with this tool. In short, Spanish mayors show no inclination towards adopting this type of measures.

MAYORS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM: LINES OF INTERPRETATION

The aim of this section is to further the study of the elements identified up to this point and to offer interpretations of the linkages between the perceptions held by the mayors and the main lines of reform. First, we address the tools adopted to intervene in the organization of local government and in matters related to the personnel at its service. Here, also, we employ the construct of mayors proposed by Egner and Heinelt (2006), in particular, their definition of mayors with an 'inward looking' profile. This way, we were able to examine Spanish mayors' attitudes towards public administration and their preference for employing certain tools of governance. Second, we analyze their perceptions about remunicipalization and outsourcing of services and we propose

possible explanations for their preferences. Finally, we briefly discuss inter-municipal cooperation and the attitude mayors show towards the use of these mechanisms.

TYPES OF MAYORS: THE "*INWARD LOOKING*" MAYOR AND THE INTERNAL MANAGEMENT OF MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION: ORGANIZATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES

With the aim of analyzing the standpoint adopted by Spanish mayors in relation to their managerial and monitoring functions of public administration, we have opted to construct an index based on the profiles identified by Egner and Heinelt (2006: 336). Unlike these authors, however, we have chosen to work with this concept in the form of an aggregate index, constructed out of the responses to the questions included in the first section of the survey. Mayors were asked to evaluate the importance they attach to a set of different tasks on a Lickert-type scale from 1 to 5, where a value of one corresponds to a task that is "not the mayor's responsibility" and a value of five corresponds to a task "of utmost importance". To construct this index, the following tasks were taken into consideration:

– Guarantee the quality of local services.
– Set goals for transforming the administrative structure.
– Attract resources from external sources.
– Guarantee that the political-administrative process operates correctly.
– Guide public administration personnel in their day-to-day activities.

For each task, an index value was assigned only to those responses awarded a score corresponding to a four or five on the scale. Due to various effects associated with responses on surveys of this type, we decided that only answers given a high value should be reflected in the final index score. More specifically, a value of 0.5 was assigned to answers awarded a four, corresponding to the category of "great importance", and a value of 1 was assigned to answers awarded a 5, corresponding to the category of "utmost importance". Consequently, the aggregate index ranges between 0 and 5. Table 7 reports the descriptive statistics for the index and the variables from which it was constructed.

Table 7 presents high mean values for all the variables. Indeed, this was the reason why it was decided not to assign values to mayors' responses below four (corresponding to a task considered to be of "great importance"). Guaranteeing the quality of local services and attracting resources from external sources stand out in terms of the importance attached to them, with means close to the maximum possible values, and minimums corresponding to category three (i.e., a task deemed to be of "moderate importance"). The composite index shows that some of the mayors' responses are not included (that is, they did not rate any of the functions as being of either "great" or of "utmost" importance), indicating that they do consider their role in the managing and monitoring of certain municipal activities to be relevant.

Table 7.

Main descriptive statistics of the 'inward looking' index and its variables

	Nº	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Guarantee the quality of local services	303	3	5	4.69	.498
Set goals for transforming the administrative structure	297	1	5	3.76	.669
Attract resources from external sources (...)	301	3	5	4.48	.575
Guarantee that the political-administrative process operates correctly	294	1	5	4.03	.683
Guide public administration personnel in their day-to-day activities	295	1	5	3.26	.956
'Inward looking' index	291	.00	5.00	2.7285	.90412

We also considered it interesting to index the mayors' perceptions of certain activities and tools linked to the management of the municipal council. In this case, the elements were extracted from two questions, one that asked them about the challenges a mayor has to face and how much of a priority it was to them and another which asked them how far they agreed with statements related to specific actions. The final index included the following items:

– Address questions of a politico-administrative nature […].
– Internal target agreements contribute to a more effective management.
– Internal reporting systems contribute to better departmental management.
– Selection and systematic training of future managers is a permanent task.
– Workers' performance appraisals are linked with significant performance-related pay or bonuses.

The index is constructed in a similar way to that of the "inward looking" index, so that here again a value was only associated with the answers that indicate positions of greatest agreement. We refer to this index as the "municipal management" index since it includes elements linked to the management of the local authority. Table 8 shows the main descriptive values of the index and the variables from which it is constructed. The results for some of these statements have been discussed in earlier sections, so we shall not repeat ourselves here. However, it can be seen that the "municipal management" index, as with the previous index, fluctuates between 0 and 5 and, although this table does not allow us to observe it, presents a normal distribution.

These two variables, with the structure of aggregate indexes, were constructed in order to obtain explanatory models connected to hypothesis number 1 (H$_1$). Unfortunately, the outcomes derived from them are not as informative as expected. In the case of the profile of the "inward looking" mayor, this index was based on a number of

Table 8.

MAIN DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE 'MUNICIPAL MANAGEMENT' INDEX AND ITS VARIABLES

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Address questions of a politico-administrative nature, e.g. improve relations with citizens, offer better and more efficient services, protect integrity and fight corruption, etc.	300	2	5	4.31	.676
Internal target agreements contribute to a more effective management	299	1	5	4.21	.665
Internal reporting systems contribute to better departmental management	298	2	5	4.22	.607
Selection and systematic training of future managers is a permanent task	298	1	5	3.69	.785
Workers' performance appraisals are linked with significant performance-related pay or bonuses	298	1	5	3.12	.911
'Municipal management' index	303	.00	5.00	2.4340	.91017

models that work with hypotheses underpinned by the theory; however, none of them seems to be confirmed by our data. Specifically, our initial hypothesis was that, in line with neo-institutional planning, forming part of the institution could explain a different position regarding the functions of the mayor within local government. In this sense, we employed various models of operationalization that did not produce results of any great interest. In contrast, the variable linked to mayors' ideological stances does reveal a certain relationship. Table 9 shows the Pearson correlation coefficient values between a series of variables and between those of ideology and the 'inward looking' index. The literature to date has provided little insight about ideology and mayors' perceptions of their role in the management of the administration. In fact, Egner and Heinelt (2006) opted for an endogenous analysis with respect to the constituent elements of the institutional position of responsibility. Thus, in full awareness that we should be cautious about our claims, given that we are dealing with survey data, it seems that mayors who are ideologically more conservative tend to express a greater concern for aspects related to municipal administration and management. It should be added, however, that the distribution of the variable corresponding to the mayors' self-reported ideological position shows a tendency for them to identify themselves as being more progressive, with a mean value of 3.4 on a left to right spectrum from 0 to 10. This does not detract from the result of the analysis that points to a relationship between these two dimensions; yet, it should be borne in mind that, in general, center-right mayors placed themselves in fairly moderate positions on the spectrum.

Similarly, the analysis of the extent to which the mayors agreed with a series of statements in relation to certain municipal activities also failed to produce results of

any great interest. As expected, both indices ('inward looking' and 'municipal management') show a moderate, statistically significant relationship, but they present very few relations with other variables identified in the literature. In this sense, both the mayors' sector of origin (public or private) and ideology show signs of a relationship. But, applying a significance parameter threshold of 0.05 leaves both above this boundary. Even so, they are both significant at the 0.01 level, suggesting some evidence of a positive relationship in both cases, where a more conservative ideology may contribute to greater agreement with certain activities of municipal management.

TABLE 9.

BEHAVIOR OF THE 'MUNICIPAL MANAGEMENT' INDEX

		Municipal management index	Inward looking index	Ideology	Sector of origin
Municipal management index	Pearson correlation	1	.338**	.103	.120
	Signif. (bilateral)		.000	.085	.064
	Nº	303	291	278	241
Inward looking index	Pearson correlation	.338**	1	.130*	.031
	Signif. (bilateral)	.000		.033	.635
	Nº	291	291	269	233
Ideology	Pearson correlation	.103	.130*	1	-.097
	Signif. (bilateral)	.085	.033		.136
	Nº	278	269	278	240
Sector of origin	Pearson correlation	.120	.031	-.097	1
	Signif. (bilateral)	.064	.635	.136	
	Nº	241	233	240	241

  * The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

FROM OUTSOURCING TO REMUNICIPALIZATION: CHANGING THE METHODS OF SERVICE DELIVERY

As discussed in the previous section, the results of the survey allow us to explore mayors' perceptions regarding the current trends in the provision and management of public services. Indeed, the literature had previously captured a change that seemed to point to a return to the remunicipalization of certain public services, after a long period in which outsourcing had been the most commonly adopted system for the modernization of the public administration (Wollmann and Marcou, 2010; Kuhlmann and Wollmann, 2014). The section dedicated to this question has allowed us to

confirm that remunicipalization (or the reduction in outsourcing) was the preferred option when considering a change in the method of service delivery.

Specifically, the descriptive results show that the motives reported for changing the delivery method were centered primarily on cost savings and on enhancing the quality of public services. Table 10 presents the reasons proffered by the mayors for changing service delivery to one or other of the two systems. Interestingly, both in the case of a preferred increase in outsourcing and in that of a reduction in this form of service provision (which we interpret as being a vote in favor of remunicipalization), the reasons most frequently given by the mayors coincide. That is, mayors who believe it necessary to increase privatization and those who feel it should be reduced, both consider that these changes will result in cost savings for citizens and an increase in the quality of public services.

Table 10.

Reasons for increasing or reducing outsourcing

	Increase outsourcing		Reduce outsourcing		Total
	Nº	%	Nº	%	
Costs of service delivery for citizens	11	30.6	27	26.5	38
Local authority budget	3	8.3	0	0.0	3
Flexibility and change of orientation of service delivery	7	19.4	8	7.8	15
Control over service delivery	3	8.3	12	11.8	15
Quality of service delivery	12	33.3	49	48.0	61
Others	0	0.0	6	5.9	6
Total	36	100.0	102	100.0	138

The fact that their respective reasons coincide has led us to question the underlying discourse on which these changes are based. To help to interpret the results, a series of variables were used to build analytical models that might enable us to examine the relationships that occur —as we suggested in hypothesis number 2 (H_2). Specifically, two dichotomous variables were constructed: mayors that expressed an intention to introduce changes (in one direction or another) and mayors who believed outsourcing should be reduced (at the expense, that is, of increased remunicipalization). In doing so, we identified three variables that might have an effect on this decision: the mayor's ideology, the amount of time the mayor had been involved in politics and the mayor's sector of origin (public or private).

In the case of the first model, the analysis yielded no significant results. That is, it appears that that the intention to maintain the status quo and the intention of introducing changes in the system are unrelated to any of the variables analyzed. In the second case, by contrast, the model produced significant results and gave rise to an interesting interpretation. Table 11 shows the results for the binomial logistic model

that analyzed the reduction in the outsourcing of service delivery. The model is significant and two of the variables, namely ideology and the number of years in politics, present statistically significant negative coefficients. That is, mayors to the left of the ideological spectrum and with fewer years in politics are more favorable to a reduction in the outsourcing of public services.

TABLE 11.

LOGISTIC MODEL FOR THE REDUCTION IN OUTSOURCING

	Reduce outsourcing
Ideology	-0.292*** (0.088)
No. years in politics	-0.037** (0.018)
Sector	0.408 (0.304)
Constant	0.642 (0.429)
Observations	213
Log likelihood	260.711
Nagelkerke's R-squared	0.124

Note: * $p<0.1$; ** $p<0.05$; *** $p<0.01$.

From an analytical perspective, this points to a coherent explanation: mayors' ideology is a determinant of the decision to remunicipalize and, if we complement this with our analysis of their underlying motives, it seems that it is their ideology that determines the outcome of their reasoning but not the reasoning itself. In other words, both mayors who defend an increase in outsourcing and those who seek its reduction do so by resorting to similar arguments, namely a reduction in costs and an improvement in the quality of public services. According to our data, it seems that in facing this dilemma, mayors' ideology and the number of years they have been engaged in politics (albeit the first of these to a much greater degree) are both relevant factors.

THE MAYORS' STANCE ON INTER-MUNICIPAL COOPERATION

Table 6, in the section dedicated to the analysis of the mayors' perceptions of inter-municipal cooperation, examines various elements in seeking the mayors' opinions about various courses of action that might lead to an improvement in local government. Specifically, mayors were offered three options: seeking improvements by means of inter-municipal cooperation, seeking improvements by means of amalgamations or

failing to consider either option useful for the actions stated. By focusing on four specific elements, we propose a new index to capture mayors' stance on inter-municipal cooperation. This index allows us to explore hypothesis number 3 (H_3). Although the last of these elements is unrelated to management–given that it is presented as a possible element of improvement, it has been included in the index since it does not measure the perceived utility for the specific improvement of the administrative organization, but rather the perceived utility of cooperation as an instrument of administrative reform. The elements included are:

– Professionalization and quality of administrative staff
– Service quality
– Cost saving
– Political participation

In this case, the bivariate models once more reveal a number of points of interest. Table 12 shows the results for these models. Somewhat unusually in this case, the statistically significant relationships present a negative coefficient. That is, according to the data gathered, the mayors that score highest on the "inward looking" index value the possibilities of inter-municipal cooperation more negatively; likewise, it seems that the ideology held also intervenes in mayors' perceptions of inter-municipal cooperation, so that mayors who hold more conservative beliefs are less favorable to instruments of this type.

TABLE 12.
BEHAVIOR OF THE 'INTER-MUNICIPAL COOPERATION' INDEX

		Cooperation index	Inward looking index	Ideology	Sector of origin
Cooperation index	Pearson correlation	1	-.142*	-.141*	.059
	Signif. (bilateral)		.021	.021	.368
	Nº	274	265	267	232
Inward looking index	Pearson correlation	-.142*	1	.130*	.031
	Signif. (bilateral)	.021		.033	.635
	Nº	265	291	269	233
Ideology	Pearson correlation	-.141*	.130*	1	-.097
	Signif. (bilateral)	.021	.033		.136
	Nº	267	269	278	240
Sector of origin	Pearson correlation	.059	.031	-.097	1
	Signif. (bilateral)	.368	.635	.136	
	Nº	232	233	240	241

* The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In any case, and in the same way as in the previous examples, it is essential to remember that, although the models present points of interest, they must be treated with caution, since they are survey data based on the subjects' perceptions.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has analyzed the perceptions held by Spanish mayors on a range of aspects related to the reform of public administration. To do so, we opted to employ a theoretical approach based on the construction of the figure of the mayor based in the way in which they define their functions and the inclusion of the main axes of reform identified in the comparative literature. Our point of departure, therefore, recognizes the important position held by Spanish mayors in relation to the management of the municipal council. This approach has been vindicated by our survey data, since the majority of mayors rate very high the importance of their functions in leading and managing the public administration. In short, Spanish mayors see this area as forming a significant part of their specific responsibilities.

Likewise, we have analyzed the different lines of reform that the literature identifies as constituting the main axes of transformation of local governments in Europe. Here, we find that Spanish mayors hold a favorable or highly favorable opinion of most of these reform measures. This is of particular relevance if we bear in mind that most of these actions necessitate the unequivocal intervention of the mayor in the affairs of local government. Thus, the figure of the mayor as a manager is reinforced; in other words, mayors adopt a role with a clear vocation to act and to introduce measures to improve municipal management. This idea is connected with our hypothesis number 1 (H_1), seeking to test the consistency of this classification.

The position taken up by the mayors in relation to the remunicipalization of service delivery is of particular interest, as we propose in our hypothesis number 2 (H_2). While the overall tendency is one of continuity (that is, neither increasing nor reducing outsourcing), a good third o mayors express their support for remunicipalization, a considerably higher number than those expressing a preference for outsourcing. Interestingly, the motives in both cases are identical (the improvement of service quality and a reduction in costs), while the analyses undertaken confirm the relevance of ideology in these stances. That is, the ideological stance is the determining factor in an otherwise identical discourse that seeks the improvement of the service and a cut in costs.

Our analysis of the mayors' views on inter-municipal cooperation shows that the mechanism is typically seen as being useful for overcoming municipal fragmentation, according to hypothesis number 3 (H_3). However, it should be borne in mind that the survey was conducted in municipalities with a population larger than 10 000 inhabitants, which most likely influenced opinions on the subject. Mayors expressed a stronger preference for inter-municipal cooperation than for amalgamations, even in

the case of achieving greater cost reductions. As such, the situation remains the same on this matter and Spanish mayors continue to resist amalgamations preferring other measures of a less aggressive nature, such as inter-municipal cooperation.

The Spanish mayors' profile that emerges from this study is that of a figure closely involved in running and managing the local government and who is open to the implementation of certain measures; in short, mayor-managers who intervene and act in the organization and operation of their municipal authorities. The enormous difficulties to analyze a local map of 8124 municipalities prevents us from applying this type of methodologies to mayors from smaller municipalities; yet this remains a pending task for the discipline given the great relevance of these institutions that represent 90 % of all Spanish municipalities.

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