
Title of the project:	The politics of radical municipalism
Contact:	Bertie Russell (PI)
Web page:	https://portalrecerca.uab.cat/en/projects/the-politics-of-radical-municipalism
Area:	radical municipalism, council democracy, participatory democracy, local government, local democracy

What?

In this research project we focus on radical municipalism as a potential political alternative to the nation-state. It is an attempt to fill the theoretical gap in this embryonic field and its existing literature by bringing different cases into dialogue with the objective of distinguishing and characterising, contextualising and explaining, the strategies followed by radical municipalists in different parts of the world.

The objective of the project is threefold: 1) To establish a conceptual typology of the different variegations of radical municipalism, in terms of their politics: who makes political decisions, how is democratic decision-making organised, which structures are established, how is political power built and shared, etc. 2) To contribute to the theorisation of radical municipalism by engaging with related discussions in political theory/philosophy, such as deliberative democracy, council democracy, prefigurative politics, social movement theory and decentered governance. 3) International knowledge exchange and dissemination of the Catalan case.

Who?

IP: Bertie Russell (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona). Marie Skłodowska-Curie research fellow at the IGOP, 2022-2025. His research project (MIDPO) is focused on the role of hybrid models of public ownership in contributing to systemic change. He was previously a research associate on projects focused on the Foundational Economy (University of Cardiff) and Co-Producing Urban Governance (University of Sheffield).

[Bianchi, Iolanda \(Investigator\)](#)

[Blanco Fillola, Ismael Ivan \(Investigator\)](#)

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Why?

In the face of the current legitimacy crises of the state and of representative democracy, radical municipalism offers alternative paths to build new forms of political power from the ground up, across the ideological spectrum. Catalonia has seen a proliferation of innovative approaches to the deepening of democracy from the local level, led by civil society, political parties and public institutions. In other places, different varieties of radical municipalism are also being explored. Nevertheless, the recent explosion of academic production in the field has often treated radical municipalism as an homogeneous phenomenon.

In the case of Catalonia, these tensions become even more clear: a very significant part of the population does not see the Spanish state as the legitimate seat of political power (Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió, 2022 and previous years). But the alternative of a Catalan State (federated or not) runs against the global trend of the decline of state's legitimacy, and in fact it has been losing support in the last few years. Here, municipalism has a long history and the Catalan Association of Municipalities is but one of the manifestations of its strength. More recently, we can see a multiplication of independent candidacies (Monterde, 2019; Ubasart-González, 2012) that have challenged the dominance of traditional political parties and also, in 2011, the creation of the Association of Municipalities for Independence that has even challenged the political framework of the Spanish state. But what forms of organisation of political power, based on citizen participation, can grow from the ground up and cross the whole ideological spectrum? Is this a mere utopia or are there real examples of such a territorial form of organising power?

How?

The project will look at the political strategies followed by municipalist groups in Catalonia and in different parts of the world, both inside and outside political institutions, and will differentiate and organise these as distinct tendencies that can be useful to compare and to analyse cases. The objectives of this research grant will be fulfilled through a combination of desk-based research of the literature, documentary analysis of primary and secondary texts and thematic analysis of previously collected interview data.

We will build a typology of radical municipalist political processes, framed as ideal-types on the basis of secondary sources: academic literature, press articles, critical commentaries, materials produced by municipalist collectives/parties/institutions, videos and other multimedia and online content. We will engage with the existing literature on radical municipalism and council democracy. Finally, we want to contribute to the visualisation of the Catalan political laboratory, building on the under-developed existing literature (Bernat and Whyte, 2019), by including papers analysing the Catalan case in the edited volume.

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Call: Research proposal (2022 IEA grant programme, M4).

When?

11/10/23 → 10/01/25