

Spain's Experience in Implementing Gender Quotas in Local Government: Impact on Urban Development

Nadiia Herbut, Associate Professor, PhD in Political Science¹ (ORCID: 0000-0001-9776-3386)

¹ Kyiv National University of Construction and Architecture, Kyiv, Ukraine

ABSTRACT

The article analyzes Spain's experience in implementing gender quotas in local government following the adoption of the 2007 law. The impact of 40-percent quotas on the quality of urban governance is examined through analysis of changes in transparency, budgetary priorities, participatory governance, and urban planning. It is found that the implementation of quotas led to significant improvement in the quality of local governance, increased transparency, and more socially-oriented policies. Recommendations are proposed for adapting Spain's experience in Ukraine.

Keywords: EU, Spain, gender quotas, elections, local government, city, gender equality, inclusiveness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary democratic societies increasingly recognize the importance of ensuring equal representation of women and men in political processes. This issue becomes particularly relevant at the local government level, as local councils make decisions that directly affect citizens' daily lives: urban infrastructure development, transportation systems, environmental policy, and social services.

Despite the existence of an international legal framework for ensuring gender equality, particularly the CEDAW Convention and Goal 5 within the UN Sustainable Development Goals, women's participation in local government bodies in most countries worldwide continues to remain disproportionately low.

Gender quotas as an instrument for ensuring women's political participation have gained widespread adoption globally. However, the question of these quotas' impact on the quality of urban development and governance remains insufficiently researched. The analysis of specific European experience becomes particularly significant: What accompanying mechanisms are necessary to ensure not only formal but also substantive influence of women on decision-making? How has the implementation of quotas affected local policy priorities and the quality of urban development? What challenges arise during the implementation process and how can they be overcome? The experience of Spain is of particular interest as part of the broader European context.

Ukraine, being in the process of democratic transformations and post-war reconstruction, has a unique opportunity to utilize European experience to create a more inclusive local government system.

2. OBJECTIVE

To investigate the impact of gender quotas in local government on urban development through analysis of European experience and determine the prospects for implementing best practices in Ukraine.

3. SPAIN: COMPREHENSIVE CHANGES FOLLOWING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GENDER QUOTAS

In 2007, Spain adopted a law requiring political parties to include at least 40% women in each electoral list. The law has

two key features: effective sanctions for non-compliance and a structured system for candidate placement. Following the implementation of quotas, the share of women among municipal council members increased from 32% to 40% and continued to grow to 45% in 2019 [1].

The increase in the number of women in municipalities led to improved transparency in local governance [2].

A study of municipalities in the autonomous community of Madrid from 2010-2019 revealed significant differences in budgetary policy depending on the gender composition of local government. In municipalities where councils were dominated by men, social expenditures decreased by approximately 20% of the total budget. In contrast, in gender-balanced municipalities (or those where women were even more numerous), no significant cuts to social programs occurred. The most telling results were found in municipalities with gender-equal council composition and a woman as mayor: they increased funding for social services by 40% compared to similar cities under male mayors [7].

After 2015, participatory budgeting became a common practice in Spanish cities, particularly those under the leadership of female mayors. A notable example is Madrid (3.3 million inhabitants) under the mayoralty of Manuela Carmena, where the digital participatory budget platform Decide Madrid was introduced. The results were impressive: in 2016, 60 million euros were allocated to projects proposed and selected by residents themselves, and by 2018 this amount was increased to 100 million euros. Over 67,000 Madrid residents participated in the process, which exceeded the initial indicators of citizen participation in idea submission and voting by 47% [4].

Under female mayors, public safety expenditures increased through the implementation of crime prevention programs and improved street lighting. Additionally, support for domestic violence victim assistance centers was increased, and the "Safe City for Women" program was introduced.

Consequently, urban planning decisions became more inclusive and oriented toward people's daily needs – a shift often attributed to female managers' greater sensitivity to social justice issues. For example, during the financial crisis, instead of general tax increases, they attempted to support the most affected segments of the population. Female leadership is often associated with greater investment in "public goods" that directly improve community quality of life [3].

Barcelona (1.6 million inhabitants) under the leadership of female mayor Ada Colau (2015-2023) became the flagship of gender-sensitive urban policy in Europe. The city implemented a Comprehensive Gender Justice Strategy that encompassed

over 400 initiatives across various sectors – from culture and economy to healthcare and urban planning. Barcelona introduced innovative approaches to the "caring city," focusing on the needs of daily life: from developing care services (for children, elderly, people with disabilities) to reconceptualizing urban space in terms of safety and convenience. During Colau's tenure, the city budget acquired a more social orientation. Community trust in municipal government during this period increased to 60%, significantly exceeding pre-2015 indicators. Barcelona serves as an example of how gender-sensitive leadership can fundamentally transform a major European city [5].

Gijón (270,000 inhabitants) under the leadership of female mayor Carmen Moriyón (2011-2018), elected from a civic platform, gained a reputation as one of Spain's most transparent cities. In 2014, Gijón entered the top three of the national Transparency Index. Moriyón's leadership style was characterized as more open and consensus-based: she created permanent working groups with representatives from civic associations to address city issues. The city launched the information portal "Transparencia Gijón," which provided citizens with full access to data on the budget, contracts, and municipal council property. Even during a period of strict budgetary austerity, the city hall not only preserved all social services but also opened a new municipal employment center for women and youth [6].

Torrelodones (25,000 inhabitants) under the leadership of Elena Biurrún (2011-2018) became an example of successful implementation of an anti-corruption platform at the local level. During her two terms as mayor, the town completely eliminated its debts, significantly improved management efficiency, and gained the trust of the business community. The new administration conducted a comprehensive audit of municipal finances, eliminated dubious contracts, and introduced an electronic tender system that saved millions of euros for the community. The town was among the first in the country to join the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and began publishing absolutely all data about the mayor's office operations. Importantly, the authorities established close contact with residents – several civic councils were created (on urban planning, ecology, youth issues) that had real influence on decisions. Local media noted that the mayor's management style became "homely, attentive": she could be seen at residents' building meetings and personally responded to citizens' emails. Within a few years, the level of satisfaction with quality of life in Torrelodones increased significantly. In 2014, Biurrún was awarded the national prize "Best Reform Mayor" for forming a new culture of municipal governance based on the principles of transparency, accountability, and service orientation [6].

4. CONCLUSIONS

Spain's experience in implementing gender quotas in local government demonstrates their significant positive impact on the quality of urban governance. Over nearly two decades since the adoption of the 2007 law, this European country has achieved not only quantitative changes in women's representation, but also substantial qualitative transformations in municipal policy.

The long-term implications of Spain's gender quota policy extend beyond immediate governance improvements. Cities with sustained female leadership have shown greater resilience during economic crises, more innovative approaches to urban challenges, and higher citizen satisfaction rates. The policy has

also contributed to changing social attitudes toward women in leadership, with younger generations now viewing female political participation as natural rather than exceptional. This cultural shift creates a self-reinforcing cycle where more women are encouraged to enter politics, and communities become more receptive to diverse leadership styles.

The main achievements of cities with gender-balanced councils and female mayors include increased governance transparency; reorientation of budgetary priorities toward social needs and safety; development of participatory governance (involving citizens in decision-making); and creation of a more inclusive urban environment that takes into account the needs of different population groups.

For Ukraine, the European experience presents valuable lessons, particularly in the context of post-war reconstruction and European integration. Effective implementation of gender quotas is an important factor in building democratic institutions and creating cities oriented toward the needs of all citizens. Certainly, gender composition is not the only success factor, as results also depend on team professionalism. However, Spain's lesson lies in the fact that when women receive an equal place at the decision-making table, cities become more open and barrier-free. Expanding women's access to urban governance requires a comprehensive approach that includes political will, application of existing legislative norms, creation of an appropriate political culture, and formation of public awareness of gender equality as an integral component of democratic governance.

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