



## Article

# Emancipatory Urban Citizenship Regimes in Postpandemic Catalonia, Scotland, and Wales

Igor Calzada <sup>1,2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD), Social Science Research Park (Sbarc/Spark), School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University, Maindy Road, Cathays, Cardiff CF24 4HQ, UK; calzadai@cardiff.ac.uk; Tel.: +44-7887661925

<sup>2</sup> Fulbright Scholar-In-Residence (S-I-R), US-UK Fulbright Commission, Bakersfield (CSUB), Institute for Basque Studies (IBS), California State University, 9001 Stockdale Hwy, Bakersfield, CA 9331, USA

**Abstract:** Wide tensions regarding the organization of nation-state power have been triggered over the last years in the UK and Spain. By contrast, in the UK, (i) the plebiscite on Scottish Independence has been characterized since 2014 so far by a regular hegemony of the SNP in Scotland, and (ii) more recently, distinct resilient responses to tackle COVID-19 have dramatically shifted perceptions about the potential constitutional arrangements in Wales partially opposing a state-centric vision of the UK. By contrast, the role played by the constitutionally *illegal* but socially *constitutive* referendum in Catalonia on 1 October 2017, remarkably provoked the re-emergence of the Spanish far-right narrative through the surge of the new political party called Vox. In both cases, *the urban* in Glasgow, Cardiff, and Barcelona has been shaping various oppositions to state-centric agendas, and such oppositions have shaped elections in the UK and Spain. This article sheds light on the distinct, emerging, and emancipatory urban citizenship regimes in Catalonia, Scotland, and Wales, particularly illustrating the roles that Barcelona, Glasgow, and Cardiff, respectively, are playing in articulating a counter-reaction by rescaling a state-centric vision. This article employs past elections' evidence to illustrate such regimes amid postpandemic times in datafied states.

**Keywords:** democracy; citizenship; emancipatory; urban; city-regions; COVID-19; devolution; datafied states; nation-states; rescaling

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## 1. Introduction

Debates regarding the organization and legitimation of nation-state power both institutionally and territorially have been exacerbated in the post-Brexit UK (Keating 2022b) and in the aftermath of the constitutionally *illegal* but socially *constitutive* independence referendum attempt on 1 October 2017 that dramatically occurred in Catalonia by directly rescaling Spain (Agnew 2017; Calzada 2019; Gutiérrez and Font 2022; Keating 2021a, 2022a). Despite clear differences in both cases, these debates unfolded tensions between state-centric, ethnic-driven neo-nationalism (Koch and Paasi 2016) and the counter-reaction stemming from the emancipatory politics of major metropolitan city-regions (Calzada 2017; Fricke and Gualini 2017). Both cases, rooted in two entirely different historic path dependencies, show a neo-nationalistic (also ethno-populistic; Jenne 2018) pattern that advocates the territorial integrity of existing nation-states. Yet, in different degrees, they mobilize illiberal and populist economic politics, and more directly, recentralizing devolved powers by provoking resistance and urban activism—clearly differing in intensity, claims, and strategies—in favor of the claim of the ‘right to decide’ in metropolitan city-regions, such as Barcelona, Glasgow, and Cardiff (Calzada 2018a).

Despite the fact that the ‘right to decide’ does not represent a de facto legislative corpus, actually even being highly contested by unionist positions (at least in Spain) who refer to it as an *invention* (Hayward 2022; Keating 2021c), this article sheds light on the

claim that has been broadly claimed by Western secessionist civil society movements and deeply analyzed in academic rigorous events and debates (Calzada 2014; Cramer 2015; Davidson 2016; Griffiths and Waters 2022; Sanjaume-Calvet et al. 2022).

Consequently, this article defines ‘emancipatory urban citizenship regime’ as the common pattern of a group of citizens who favor the articulation of some form of the ‘right to decide’ as an emancipatory push (Bignami et al. 2022; Calzada 2023). ‘Emancipatory urban citizenship regimes’ are defined, therefore, as citizenship patterns that are influencing the nation-state’s political agenda toward further devolution claims but without reaching out necessarily secession.

Paradoxically though, according to Keating, at least for the case of the territorial integrity of the UK, the “greatest threat might come from unionism itself” (2021c, p. 29). His main argument is that, historically, the UK has been understood very differently in the component parts of the UK, whereas in England, the UK was usually seen as a unitary state based on the principles of parliamentary sovereignty and supremacy; in Scotland and Wales (as well as increasingly the Northern Ireland; Calzada and Bustard 2022), it was seen as a union of nations joined together in multiple ways. A similar argument could be used to refer to Spain given that Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia understand Spain through their historic attachment (or detachment) to it and their willingness (or not) to remain as such. A widespread Spanish public opinion, broadly speaking and with clear exceptions as well, rule out any debate on the potential constitutional re-arrangements’ scenarios (Calzada 2014; Calzada and Bildarratz 2015). Although there are several academic voices that argue around the fact that Catalonia’s independence referendum is *per se* a conflictive matter (Arrighi 2019; Ferreira 2021; Gray 2020; Molina 2015; Oller et al. 2020; Ruiz Casado 2022; Umaner-Duba 2020), the position of this article is allowing an open debate regardless of preferences and outcomes by learning from other cases and, more importantly, avoiding one-size-fits-all normative interpretations.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of techno-political responses to the pandemic by central governments (Bignami et al. 2022), a large majority of citizens in these three metropolitanized city-regional nations have been increasingly demanding a say around measures—biopolitical border controls and advanced dataveillance technologies—insofar as they directly affect their lives and are consequently pushing back against populist identity politics and keeping away from state-centric policies—in resistance to—governmental logics (Bratton 2021; Calzada 2022d).

Hence, as Jessop anticipated (Jessop 1990), and as exacerbated in postpandemic times (Etherington et al. 2022), the territorial coincidence of nation-states, governing order, economy, citizenship, and identity can no longer be taken for granted. Against this backdrop, the internal state-centric resistance, uniformity, and the watchdog role played by those fiercely defending the status quo resembles nostalgic imperial times driven by ethnic, banal, and protectionist (neo-)nationalism (Bieber 2018a, 2018b; Billig 1995). By contrast, the three cases shown in this article are challenging this neo-nationalist vision by opening future research directions, thereby buttressing their position as enclaves of urban emancipatory and progressive politics (Arendt 1949). Barcelona, Glasgow, and Cardiff are shaping various oppositions to state-centric neo-nationalistic agendas by surfacing distinct emerging citizenship regimes (Calzada 2022a) and that such oppositions, by and large, have formed both urban and national politics in the UK and Spain.

Consequently, in both cases, particularly exacerbated through postpandemic unprecedented conditions and rearrangements, *the urban* in Glasgow, Cardiff, and Barcelona has been shaping various oppositions to state-centric agendas, and such oppositions have shaped elections in the UK and Spain (Calzada 2022c). This article aims to shed light on the distinct emerging urban emancipatory citizenship regimes in Catalonia, Scotland, and Wales, particularly illustrating the roles that Barcelona, Glasgow, and Cardiff, respectively, are playing in articulating a counter-reaction by rescaling a state-centric vision. The article employs past elections’ evidence to illustrate such emerging urban emancipatory citizenship regimes amid postpandemic times in datafied states (Calzada 2023).

This article is structured as follows: in the next section, a literature review on rescaling is presented to better illustrate the changing nature of the pervasive and ongoing transformation of nation-states followed by the presentation of the case study methodology for the three cases, and particularly, the role played in this transformation by the main cities, namely Barcelona, Glasgow, and Cardiff; then, the results are discussed regarding emerging emancipatory urban citizenship regimes, which, in fact, is the main contribution of this article. Finally, the article concludes with a future research agenda on the main topic of the article responding to the research question of the article: Against the backdrop of COVID-19, how might emerging emancipatory urban citizenship regimes stemming from Barcelona, Glasgow, and Cardiff, contribute to rescale nation-states given the highly digitalized pattern of contemporary societies in datafied states (Burrell and Fourcade 2021; Calzada 2023)?

## 2. Literature Review: Rescaling Datafied Nation-States

The 20th century nation-state might be gradually evolving into a new form in which digitalization and datafication processes might contribute to rescale its nature (Calzada 2022b, 2023). According to several scholars (Khanna 2016; Taylor 1994), the nation-state cannot control the public and digital space any longer. Against this backdrop, the 21st century nation-states are drastically shifting from inside and from outside as the paradigmatic case of Estonia's e-Residence program shows, given its increasing and advanced technopolitical development. Estonia is an algorithmic nation that has turned into a datafied and borderless state characterized as 'citizenship by connection' (Budnitsky 2022; Calzada 2018b; Masso et al. 2022). Although, in general terms, since the 19th and 20th centuries, nation-states' related political and institutional terminology and associated policy architecture has remained so far unaltered. Probably the case of Estonia is providing further insights about the way in which an infant nation-state could anticipate new instruments and devices based on cutting-edge technologies, such as blockchain or DAO (decentralized autonomous organizations) enabling new emerging forms of citizenship (De Filippi et al. 2020). Buterin's new book (Buterin 2022) provides some inspiration based on his Ethereum platform by anticipating how several peripheral nodes can alter the main structure of a centralized system, such as the Westphalian nation-states' system (Calzada 2018b). Despite this, we are in the early stage of such digital transformation; the Twitter vs Mastodon affair these days is challenging in real time the way the so-called 'network effect' could be shaped by facilitating nation-states' rescaling through the decentralized, federated, and bottom-up 'fediverse' (Calzada 2023). It remains to be seen whether this could be seen as a turning point in the Internet governance and users' digital behavior by affecting the emancipatory citizenship regimes that this article examines (Monsees 2020).

Alongside endless discussions around nation-states and their temporary nature, the literature on rescaling nation-states has broadly elucidated that the fragmentation of the state national scale has undermined the privileged position of the nation-state as the natural platform (Archer 2012; Bourne 2003; Goodwin et al. 2012; Mitchell 1991; Mykhnenko and Wolff 2018; Schou and Hjelholt 2019; Somerville 2004). As such, rescaling is defined by Keating (2013, p. 6) as "the migration of economic, social, and political systems of action and of regulation to new spatial levels above, below, and across the nation-state". Rescaling thus is a concept widely used by key political geographers and political scientists (Brenner 2009; Keating 2017), and it may have been exposed to further transformations as a result of the postpandemic datafication and digitalization processes (Cheney-Lippold 2017; Calzada 2022b). As such, nation-states have no exclusive decision-making power on major issues including defense, borders, customs, population control, currency, datafication, and immigration/biometric data flows. These data flows might be allowing rescaling from above, stemming from the excessive power that the Big Tech are concentrating as well as from below, by emancipatory trends stemming from metropolitan city-regions, including Barcelona-Catalonia, Glasgow-Scotland, and Cardiff-Wales.

Elections' results in the three cases depict an emerging trend around a pervasive emancipatory urban citizenship existence opposing, although in different degree, state-centric visions and how rescaling is likely to be occurring. However, when it comes to explain the nature and the consequences of rescaling, there is still a deep (and unresolved) academic discussion around the nature of the European nation-states going back to its inception (Bianchini 2017; Ruacan 2017). Whereas some authors suggest that there is a way of rescuing the nation-state (Atzori 2017), others, by contrast, see it as a federation in the making (Khanna 2016). This article does not attempt to solve this key point in the literature, but it contributes to shed light on the emerging nature of such emancipatory urban trends.

More recently and over the course of the pandemic, a debate has emerged about the appropriate technopolitical response when city-regional governments, including Barcelona-Catalonia, Glasgow-Scotland, and Cardiff-Wales, in reference to their national-state governments, use disease surveillance technologies to address the spread of COVID-19, illustrating the dichotomy between state-Leviathan cyber-control and protection of civil liberties and further resulting in technopolitical and city-regional dynamics and debates (Calzada 2022c; Kitchin 2020).

One of the side effects of the pandemic has been particularly the way that the urban hubs have reacted quickly to the pandemic disruption by providing very distinct technopolitical measures regarding contact tracing apps, COVID passports, and biometric measurements, among others (Bignami et al. 2022). The urban probably will be drawing attention around digitalization and datafication processes even leading the nation-state position. Nonetheless, it remains to be seen how these emerging emancipatory urban citizenship regimes and ongoing dynamics will affect the configurations of nation-states, their regulations, and digital policy instruments (Amoore 2016; Bieber 2020).

### **3. Case Study Methodology: Catalonia-Barcelona, Scotland-Glasgow, and Wales-Cardiff**

After a literature review on rescaling and the way emerging urban citizenship regimes may flourish from this macro-political process, this article focuses on three case studies to elucidate the dynamics involved in these rescaling phenomena.

Case study methodology aims to provide a consistent narrative for each case by offering evidence-based facts, including several elections and survey results that show the emancipatory urban trend that this article attempts to emphasize. The case study methodology is used in this article to present comparatively the three cases (Yin 1984, 2011). According to Krehl and Weck (2019)'s interesting article on comparative case study research in urban and regional studies, researchers should be more explicit in their way of carrying out this type of methodology. With the case study methodology, therefore, this article presents the timely context of each case by emphasizing the emancipatory urban component. Here, there is the relation of previous research published work by the author per topic and case study that is used to construct the case study methodology: 'right to decide' (Calzada 2014), 'constitutional arrangements' (Calzada and Bildarratz 2015), 'smart devolution' (Calzada 2017), Scotland and Catalonia (Calzada 2018a, 2019), and 'rescaling nation-states' (Calzada 2022a, 2022b, 2022c). The case study methodology in this article aims not only to update the case study of Catalonia-Barcelona and Scotland-Glasgow given that both cases present interesting updates but also to introduce a new (and less known) emerging player: Wales-Cardiff (Clifton and Alessia 2018; Welsh Government 2021; Wyn Jones and Lerner 2021). The three cases show how rescaling is occurring by depicting such a distinct pathway.

It goes without saying that rescaling produces tensions around the territory resulting in extreme defense of the status quo by neo-nationalistic claims. This section analyzes three cases and why nation-state rescaling could be seen as a subtle process by identifying emerging citizenship patterns that this article entitled 'emancipatory' (Friend 2012). 'Emancipatory' regimes resonate with 'statelessness' understood as a phenomenon

affecting those who are not considered as a national by any state under the operation of their law. In this article, by contrast, ‘emancipatory’ meaning is related to ‘stateless’ following the meaning given by Michael Keating through the term ‘stateless nations’ (Keating 2001). The three cases presented in this article (Catalonia, Scotland, and Wales) fit into the category of ‘emancipatory’ emerging urban citizenship regimes, yet in a different manner, given the evidence-based social mobilizations supported by policy formulations. Stateless nations and, thus, citizenship are more related to the claim of secession, which is not the main argument of this article. The three cases fluctuate in their independence claims and show clearly different intensity and contexts. It remains to be seen whether these secessionist movements are making the right arguments for independence, as Griffiths and Waters pointed out in their recent article (Griffiths and Waters 2022). Again, the aim of this article is shedding light on the emancipatory urban dimension rather than focusing on the effectiveness of such secessionist claims.

It should be clarified at the beginning of this section that the analysis will be conducted considering evidence published by the author separately in previous publications, which serve as a starting point of this novel examination. Thus, several features and evidence will be effectively referenced to provide the readership a way to illustrate such analysis. Having said that, this article has tried to summarize and to present previous research in a synthetic manner.

The following Table 1 broadly frames the case study methodology through elections’ results, population, and GDP in the three case studies, including regions (Catalonia, Scotland, and Wales) and cities (Barcelona, Glasgow, and Cardiff). Table 1 only attempts to provide an empirical support for a comprehensive case study narrative.

**Table 1.** Framing Case Study Methodology: Elections’ Results, Population, and GDP in the Three Case Studies (Regions-Cities): Catalonia-Barcelona, Scotland-Glasgow, and Wales-Cardiff.

	Catalonia	Barcelona	Scotland	Glasgow	Wales	Cardiff
Latest Elections	Catalan Regional Election	Barcelona City Council Election	Scottish Parliament Election	Glasgow City Council Election	Senedd Election	Cardiff Council Election
Date	14 February 2021	26 May 2019	6 May 2021	5 May 2022	6 May 2021	5 May 2022
Seats Won by Political Parties	PSC 33 ERC 33 JxCAT 32 Vox 11 CUP 9 ECP 8 Cs 6 PP 3	ERC 10 BComú 10 PSC 8 Cs 6 Junts 5 PP 2	SNP 64 Cons 31 Lab 22 Green 8 LD 4	SNP 37 Lab 36 Green 10 Cons 2	Lab 30 Cons 16 PC 13 LD 1	Lab 55 Cons 10 LD 10 PC 2 Propel 1 WC 1
Population (inhabitants) in regions and cities	7,566,000	3,218,223 (42%)	5,454,000	1,166,928 (21%)	3,136,000	485,000 (15%)
GDP per capita (\$) in regions and cities	€32,800	€31,157	€38,326	€37,753	€28,204	€27,372

### 3.1. Spanish Opposition to the Catalan ‘Right to Decide’

The Spanish nation-state has been gradually rescaled by Catalonia’s ‘secession crisis’ in the aftermath of the dramatic consequences of the constitutionally *illegal* and the socially *constitutive* referendum that took place on 1 October 2017 when 2,286,217 Catalan citizens attempted to exercise the ‘right to decide’ their own relation with Spain (to ultimately become *stateless citizens*).

There is a widespread assumption that identifies the Catalan secessionist movement—alongside two other Western European cases, the Basque Country in Spain and Scotland in the UK—with rural-based ethnic nationalism. By contrast, as Rodríguez-Pose (2018) argues through his extensive work on *places that do not matter*, new tribalism, also known as neo-nationalism or ethno-populism, is quickly growing in non-metropolitan areas related to state-centric positions resulting in support for the far-right party, *Vox*. This party, directly opposing Catalanist positions, not surprisingly gained 11 seats in 2021 Catalan Regional Elections (Table 1) (Gomez Arana 2021; Vampa 2020).

Nonetheless, over the last decade, the Catalan emancipatory urban citizenship regime (adopting a federalist form at the beginning and becoming currently secessionist in their claims), who are “78.7% of Catalan citizens in favor of the right to decide voting in a referendum” (Calzada 2019, p. 807), has been eminently fueled by civic nationalism rooted in the metropolitan ‘right to decide’ (as an updated version of the right-to-the-city claim) and bolstered by metropolitan hubs through an increasing push by grassroots movements in metropolitan Barcelona (Calzada 2018a; Lecours 2000). According to the Centre d’Estudis d’Opinió, “Catalonia becoming an independent State is higher in the metropolitan Barcelona than in Catalonia” (Calzada 2019, p. 811). Three main evidence-based facts can be identified:

First, the active role played by Barcelona in the independence referendum in 2017 as the urban/metropolitan ‘right to decide’ flagship campaign invigorating regular mass demonstrations since 2010 to protest against the prohibition of the agreed Statute of Autonomy. Alongside this, the central government created limitations—radicalized by neo-nationalist political expressions—that currently refrain Barcelona from being the metropolitan hub in its global role and by contrast favoring Madrid (Jordana 2019).

Second, Barcelona gradually has become the urban powerhouse channelling claims for the ‘right to decide’—as it could be seen with the number of city council representatives supporting it, “71% of the total” (Calzada 2018a, p. 357). As a direct counter-reaction capitalizing the resentment against Catalonia, this fact has provoked the re-emergence and the advent of the Spanish far-right neo-nationalistic narrative through the new political party, *Vox* (Álvarez-Benavides 2018; Gomez Arana 2021; Woertz 2017). *Vox* was born in 2013, gained 15% of support in the 2019 Spanish general elections—as the pivotal and established reference in Spain resembling Franco times—and is the only party supporting the elimination of all regional autonomic representations (Koch and Paasi 2016).

Consequently and third, is it feasible to accommodate Catalan emancipatory urban citizenship after the dramatic event on 1 October 2017? The current Spanish Government led by Sanchez has agreed to continue negotiating with the Catalan Government led by the pro-independence party *ERC* (Republican Left). By contrast, the emergence of the ethnic neo-nationalistic far-right party *Vox* (advocating new tribalism in Europe; Wind 2020) in favor of the empire of law, radical constitutionalism, and the ‘duty to abide’ through re-centralizing strategies to control the self-rule of Catalonia (and to standardize the remaining regions of Spain) is far from helpful to find a democratic outcome. The rationale behind *Vox* is to maximize the confrontation against anything related to an open debate around a democratic agreed solution among the Central Spanish and Catalan Autonomous Governments (Vampa 2020).

### 3.2. *The Quest for the Second Scottish (Post-Brexit) Independence Referendum*

The negative outcome of the Scottish Independence referendum in 2014 alongside with Brexit has been followed by a continuous recreation of neo-nationalistic narratives through Eurosceptic parties—including *UKIP*, *Brexit Party*, *Reform UK*, and *Abolish*—although with a marginal support nearly reaching 1% of votes both in Glasgow and Cardiff. Particularly, Glasgow, a former stronghold of the *Scottish Labour* party, portrays the resilient exponential counter-reaction opposing the state-centric vision to the Westminster government, primarily channelled through the hegemony of the *SNP* over seats in the City Council election: from 1 in 1995 to 37 in 2022 (Table 1). This result showed strong

favor of independence at the referendum, with 194,779 ‘yes’ votes over 169,347 ‘no’ votes, contrasting with the overall win of the ‘no’ votes across Scotland (Calzada 2018a; Elias 2019).

In the meantime, the Scottish First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, intends to hold a second referendum by the end of 2023, although it seems unlikely that under the hard-line position of the Prime Minister (now the recently appointed Rishi Sunak replacing the short mandate by Liz Truss) the ‘right to decide’ would be articulated as an agreed referendum through section 30 as in 2014 (Basta 2022). In addition, the legislative powers of the Scottish parliament are set out in the Scotland Act 1998, which specifies that the Scottish parliament cannot pass legislation that relates to various *reserved* matters, including the Union of the Kingdoms of Scotland and England. This fact can be controversial now in light of the willingness of the Scottish Government to execute the ‘right to decide’ through section 30, unlike in 2014.

Furthermore, over de facto Brexit since 2021, social movements are not entirely following the SNP party strategy and have been impatient, chasing Sturgeon to call for the second independence referendum. The SNP’s electoral strategy in post-devolution was a result of competing constraints internal and external to the party. The pathway to follow from now until the end of 2023 might face several challenges among the establishment of the SNP and the increasing pressure witnessed with the foundation of new grassroots movements, including *Now Scotland*, *All Under One Banner*, *Action for Scottish Independence*, *Believe in Scotland*, *Yes for EU*, to mention just a few.

The prominent question is—in a hypothetical situation that it will ultimately happen—the way in which the ‘right to decide’ will be articulated, assuming that the Catalan histrionic outcome is extremely out of the scope for the case of Scotland given that the Spanish-state political culture seems to be antipodal to the British: Is it possible to smartly address devolution-related discussions and debates (Calzada 2017)?

As Keating argues (Keating 2021b), the case of Scotland, and particularly driven by the deep changes among voters continuously in election by election in Glasgow, shows that autonomous territorial institutions have been built within the last twenty years by illustrating how a territorially distinct regime can be constructed, showing a progressively more divergence from the rest of the nation-state, which in itself contrasts with the state-centric vision that remains unaltered in England and that led Scotland toward Brexit, without backing up the outcome (Keating 2022b).

### 3.3. Wales: Accommodate, Accommodate, Accommodate

COVID-19 has become a turning point in Wales, acting as a booster of the post-devolution Wales and the constructive perception of the explicit policies that home-rule allows (Wyn Jones and Larner 2020). Unlike the *Scottish Labour Party*—not having capitalized the city-regional unique identity in their claims—the *Welsh Labour Party*, with the increasing confidence and positive public perception toward the Welsh First Minister, Mark Drakeford, seems to have found the way to respond to neo-nationalistic and further recentralize efforts of a few parties, pervasively opposing directly to the post-COVID-19 rules dictated by Westminster Government (Table 1). Furthermore, the *Welsh Labour Party* has made a strong case by setting up an even more credible scenario than the *Plaid Cymru* (Elias 2009). The latter might have been so far unsuccessful to hegemonically challenge state-centric visions very much encapsulated in Englishness by suggesting a quasi-confederal constitutional arrangement as a threshold for an independence agenda pending to be explored for Wales (Hayward 2022; Henderson and Wyn Jones 2021; Wyn Jones 2014).

The outcome of the 2021 Senedd Elections is described by Larner et al. (2022, p. 1) as follows (Table 1): “*Welsh Labour* not only benefitted from incumbency advantages drawn from voters’ approval of the Welsh Government’s handling of the pandemic, but through its use of symbols, branding, and messaging, the governing party now continues to remain attuned to a national identity position that broadly aligns with that of the electorate as a whole”. Even to support this conclusion, despite the fact that the current First Minister Mark Drakeford was under the risk to lose his seat in Cardiff West, *Welsh Labour* appeared

progressively more at ease about their likely electoral prospects while opposition parties became weaker, particularly given the high expectations not reached by *Plaid Cymru*. This trend was clearly the case in Cardiff Bay Area being the stronghold of a progressive alliance between *Welsh Labour* and *Plaid Cymru*, as a seed for the current Welsh Government agreement among both parties. It goes without saying that the fact that half of Welsh Party shows their views as openly *indy-curious* provides a clue to figure out the strong appetite for further devolution and to consolidate the emerging emancipatory urban citizenship trend onward (Staunton 2022). Another unresolved matter is to pose why *Plaid Cymru* cannot succeed when the program they always present is helping *Welsh Labour* to overtake them. There is widespread perception that election by election, *Plaid Cymru* works as the think tank for the *Welsh Labour* party, which in itself allows a governmental alliance but undermines the opportunities to lead a further ambitious *indy* agenda.

Hence, it is fair to acknowledge that rescaling may be happening already as resonated by Raymond Williams (2008) in his marvelous book, *Who Speaks for Wales? Nation, Culture, Identity*, and which was further extraordinarily characterized by the actor Michael Sheen in his plenary lectureship in 2017 through the following sentences (Sheen 2022):

“There is a reason we have a dragon on our flag. Dragons soar aloft on the magic and mystery of the past. They terrify with their ferocious power and the savagery of their fiery wrath. But most importantly, they only exist in our minds and in our hearts. Never in the real world. (...) If we want to stay British, we have to forget, or act like it doesn't matter. So don't teach it in schools. Don't talk about it in public. Don't connect. Pull down the newspapers. Keep the television quiet. Hollow out the language. Make us a theme park. Make us a gift shop. Accommodate. Accommodate. Accommodate.”

According to Rawlings (2022), “building up Wales as a politically progressive polity, and promoting federal-type ideas of subsidiarity and shared governance in the union, represents a profound and difficult constitutional challenge”. This author clearly reassures what this article attempts to demonstrate: Contemporary Wales is a substate polity remaining a work in process with largescale devolution support. While competing pressures of centralism emerges, the interest in independence is equally increasing, being reflected upon various manners, such as either *indycurious* or *indyconfident* (Staunton 2022). Despite initially, Welsh nationalism was identified as ethnic nationalism based on pure Welsh minority language advocacy, now, by contrast, and probably due to the coalition government among *Welsh Labour* and *Plaid Cymru*, is more characterized by its inclusive and progressive socioeconomic model, namely Foundational Economy (Russell et al. 2022; Wyn Jones 2014). Consequently, Wales is witnessing an increasingly fluid territorial debate that sees the establishment of a new Constitutional Commission.

Despite independence being far now as a way to accommodate emancipatory urban citizenship in Wales (Independence Commission 2021), the fact that Wales voted to leave the EU despite being a net beneficiary from EU funding and being so dependent on the European single market appears to have come as a shock to many clashing with the mainstream neo-nationalistic narrative stemming from Westminster Government. Against this unexpected post-Brexit Welsh backdrop, Raymond Williams estimated the early consequences of political devolution (Convery and Lundberg 2017; Wyn Jones and Larner 2020) and offered a robust narrative for progressivist emancipatory urban citizenship based on a Welsh–European vision of a ‘Europe of the peoples and nations.’ Brexit has, unexpectedly, been accompanied by an increase in support of devolution and among those self-identified as Welsh only, even advocating independence. Therefore, the call to action suggested in the early days by Williams may resonate now with several initiatives and projects stemming from the re-elected Welsh Government's progressive agenda, reinforcing a confederal home rule known as ‘Radical Federalism’, as well as an awakening of the civil society—particularly in Cardiff—against recentralizing efforts via state-centric neo-nationalism, through the socio-economic new paradigm called ‘Foundational Economy’ (Barbera and Jones 2020). This paradigm encompasses those goods and services, together



with the economic and social relationships that underpin them, that provide the everyday infrastructure of civilized life.

#### 4. Discussion: Emerging Emancipatory Urban Citizenship Regimes in Barcelona, Glasgow, and Cardiff

In all cases, *the urban* scale from Barcelona, Glasgow, and Cardiff has been shaping various oppositions to state-centric neo-nationalist agendas, and such oppositions, by and large, have shaped both urban and national politics in the UK and Spain. With clear, distinct historic pathways in the three cases, the tensions among state-centric neo-nationalistic expressions and more liberal and social-democratic peripheric attempts rooted in civic/metropolitan nationalism for pluralism and integration in stateless nations (Keating 2001) seem to elucidate the rationale behind these tensions.

Catalonia has often held a central position in Spanish politics. Additionally, Barcelona was the most advanced and innovative city in Spain during the 19th century. Barcelona's achievement furthered the prestige of the 'Catalanist' movement, which was initially exclusively federalist but in recent years has become clearly pro-secessionist. As a counter-reaction to the Catalan secessionism invigorated by demonstrations in Barcelona, a further re-centralizing of state-centric machinery as a long-term historical feature was intensified just after article 155 was implemented by the Spanish government to take control of key institutions of self-rule on 10 October 2017. Article 155 fixed direct rule in Catalonia to suspend the autonomy provided by the Spanish Constitution to comply with the requirement of territorial integrity and to force a recentralization.

Barcelona is mainly inhabited by working-class people who emigrated from other regions of Spain and who used to vote *PSC* but who changed to overwhelmingly supporting *Ciudadanos*, the winner of the regional elections that took place on 21 December 2017. Nonetheless, outstandingly, this trend has recently shifted in Barcelona in favor of *ERC* (*Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*), which won, respectively, first the general elections on 28 April 2019 (25% of the total votes; 1,015,355 votes), later revalidating the victory in the local elections on 26 May 2019 (21% of the total votes), and is now the primary and largest pro-independence party. *ERC* obtained 161,189 votes and *BComú* 156,493 votes in 2019 local elections, while, in 2015, the opposite occurred: *BComú* won with 176,612 votes and *ERC* only achieved 77,120 votes. This evolution shows that the Catalan party system is moving toward a political competition between a pro-independence left and an anti-independence right, which inevitably requires nuanced future examinations for the implications of rescaling the Spanish nation-state and the quest for the 'right to decide' by emerging emancipatory citizens in Catalonia.

More recently though, and in light of the fifth anniversary of the 1 October 2017, the Catalan government internal crisis has just showed an explicit rivalry between the leading governmental party, *ERC*, and its former coalition party *JxCAT*. Consequently, at present, it could be witnessed as a clash and a bitter division between the proponents of different strategies among the independence movement. This deep crisis between the two Catalan government coalition partners has led to the dismissal of the vice president of *JxCAT* by president of *ERC* (Sanjaume-Calvet and Riera-Gil 2020) (Table 1).

In Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon attempts to set up the second independence referendum by 2023 and in the prospect that the court rules against the bill to hold it, she would use the next great general election as a 'de facto referendum' where the *SNP* would be empowered to open talks on independence if it won a majority of votes in Scotland. The *Scottish Greens* have since claimed votes for their party would count toward that total. 'De facto referendum' is a fact that can remind us of the dramatic pathway in Catalonia, which ended up in the constitutionally *illegal* and socially *constitutive* referendum celebrated on 1 October 2017.

In Glasgow, the *SNP* has maintained its leading position as the largest party at Glasgow City Council after 2022 elections. The final result in Glasgow was 37 seats for the *SNP*, a drop of two, and a five-seat gain for *Scottish Labour* at 36 (Table 1). Despite all, *SNP*

is likely to use Glasgow to fuel grassroots movements as in the past given the strong working-class ethos in metropolitan Glasgow (Calzada 2018a). It remains to be seen whether the dynamics that the active civil society may initiate have or have not in mind the *SNP* macro secessionist strategy. Nonetheless, election by election, Glasgow has been dominating the political scene in Scotland and gathering grassroots events and activities in favor of independence by displacing *Scottish Labour* from its original stronghold. Glasgow has allowed the *SNP* to establish both as the main political party as well as the civilian hotspot for claiming democratic rights. By contrast, in Cardiff, unlike *Scottish Labour* in Glasgow, *Welsh Labour* has tuned up its message to attract voters in Wales that clearly oppose the state-centric vision in Westminster as well as those emancipatory citizens that aim to empower devolution through socio-economically driven *Foundational Economy* or *Radical Federalism* (Barbera and Jones 2020).

Welsh Government established the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales with two main objectives: The first was to consider and develop options for fundamental reform of the constitutional structures of the UK, in which Wales remains an integral part. The second was to consider and develop all progressive principal options to strengthen Welsh democracy and deliver improvements for the people of Wales.

Alongside this, Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) is clearly pushing ahead a metropolitan policy agenda driven by Foundational Economy (Barbera and Jones 2020) by embracing the 10 local authority areas covering Southeast Wales (Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Monmouthshire, Newport, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Torfaen, and Vale of Glamorgan). It has a population of 1.5 million, which equates to almost half of the total population of Wales. This metropolitan area has seen significant regeneration over the last decade by massively redeveloping heavy industrial areas and to create new business parks, housing, and recreational initiatives.

The *Foundational Economy* paradigm, as a socio-economic response to neoliberal policies is a potential driver for nation-state rescaling in Wales but particularly pushed and led from CCR. It has transformed the policy context in the Cardiff city-region since the elections in May 2021 and is tied to proposals to establish *Radical Federalism*, which aims to empower city-regional communities by pushing ahead an alternative socio-economic policy agenda from Cardiff as a counter-reaction to the side effects of Brexit and COVID-19.

The COVID-19 crisis has turned a searing spotlight on the relationship between the Westminster central government and the Devolved Administrations, and the Westminster Government has demonstrated a lack of commitment with Wales' elected leadership in Cardiff by provoking a counter-reaction in pursuit of an alternative digital agenda called Digital Foundation Economy (2022).

Pandemic times have been a turning point for city-regional transformation and community awakening, offering an opportunity for experimentation with data co-operatives, working toward more responsive systems of care, adequate medical services, and a fairer, more participatory data economy. Data co-operatives, which are shaped by those who need them most and grounded in the history and practices of local communities, are a potential vehicle to these changes in Cardiff and beyond within Wales.

The Foundational Economy has set the scene to re-empower communities in the spirit of *metropolitan citizenship* and solidarity. The creation of some initiatives—Wales Co-operative Centre, Bank Cambria, IndyCube, CelynCymru, DriveTaxis, and Open Food Network—has already pushed the *Radical Federalism* agenda, which may reinvigorate the whole city-regional dynamic in rescaling the nation-state by emphasizing a counter-power from the urban core in Cardiff and offering a joint, resilient policy reaction in the aftermath of Brexit and the COVID-19 crisis.

## 5. Conclusions: Future Research Directions

Hence, this article ends by suggesting future research directions by distinguishing among three emerging *emancipatory urban citizenship* regimes in Catalonia, Scotland, and

Wales, particularly illustrating the role that Barcelona, Glasgow, and Cardiff, respectively, are playing in rescaling distinctively their respective state-centric neo-nationalisms.

Given the analysis of this article on the three cases, future research directions should focus on the pervasive and pretty much invisible evidence of rescaling. Despite rescaling being perceived as a rather abstract notion, devolution is a fact that is clearly transforming the preferences of citizens from stateless nations as these examined in this article (Keating 2001). Nonetheless, and probably this is the key message of this article, the emerging nature of such self-determination and sovereignty claims by many *emancipatory citizens* is primarily an urban phenomenon. The ‘right to decide’ in Catalonia, Scotland, and Wales, cannot be detached from the urban reality insofar as these claims are made from urban and metropolitan areas (‘right to the city’; Purcell 2013; Harvey 2008), including, respectively, Barcelona, Glasgow, and Cardiff. This article thus suggests paying more attention and deeply analyzing the voting preferences in such urban areas given the importance in shaping dynamics at a city-regional level and having direct effect on state rescaling.

This article aimed to shed light on the distinct emerging emancipatory urban citizenship regimes in postpandemic Catalonia, Scotland, and Wales, particularly illustrating the roles that Barcelona, Glasgow, and Cardiff, respectively, are playing in articulating a counter-reaction by rescaling a state-centric vision. The article employs past and latest elections’ evidence to illustrate such emerging emancipatory urban citizenship regimes amid postpandemic times in datafied states (Table 1). The article concludes by responding to the research question posed in the end of the introductory section that is likely to see, in the future, a reinforcement of such an emerging pattern of emancipatory urban citizenship. Although it seems sensible to figure out that these dynamics stemming from the three cities (Barcelona, Glasgow, and Cardiff) will neither follow the same pattern nor will the effects on rescaling be similar. Future research directions should include the analysis of technopolitical dynamics, given the remarkable and increasing datafication processes that has exacerbated the brittle exposure of emancipatory (digital) citizens in post-pandemic times. This article has slightly opened this new technopolitical dimension stemming from the introduction of the aforementioned analysis of the three case studies (Caldaza 2023), which was the main aim of this article.

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