

Island public administrations as the expression of the island political power in the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands

Alberto Javier Báez-García (corresponding author)

Universidad de La Laguna, Spain
abaegarc@ull.edu.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6278-8169>

Francisco Flores-Muñoz

Universidad de La Laguna, Spain
ffloremu@ull.edu.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8194-9394>

Josué Gutiérrez-Barroso

Universidad de La Laguna, Spain
jgutierb@ull.edu.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5968-3254>

Antoni Marimon-Riutort

Universitat de les Illes Balears, Spain
antoni.marimon@uib.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7844-6016>

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Abstract

The Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands are two archipelagos that form part of Spain and the European Union. Both are autonomous communities, with institutions that foist administrative peculiarities on their respective archipelagos. Each of the islands has an island council as a governing and administrative body with specific competences to be developed in its territory. The creation of the island councils of the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands represents a specificity within the insular framework of the European Union. Their evolution has been uneven since *cabildos* were created in the Canary Islands in 1912 and *consells* in the Balearic Islands in 1978; but currently they have a similar position in the overall archipelagos and in the Spanish legal framework. This article tracks the common evolution of the island councils, as well as their current development and future prospects.

Keywords

public administration, island council, Balearic Islands, Canary Islands

Introduction

Both parts of the Kingdom of Spain, the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands are relevant tourist archipelagos with their own political peculiarities. Both, as archipelagos made up of more than one island, throughout their history they have had relationships based on disagreements between each of the islands. The different visions of the archipelago itself have led to the creation of island councils as purely island-based public administrations. Despite the different geographical situation of each archipelago, the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean Sea and the Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean, their administrative structures are similar within the Spanish state, but an exception in the European Union to which they also belong. The *consells* in the Balearic Islands and the *cabildos* in the Canary Islands respond to the desires for island autonomy. In this article, an attempt is made to clarify the common evolution of insular autonomy of these two archipelagos in the form of their island councils, detailing their position in the legal framework, as well as their common structure, the election of their members, and their competences.

Insularity, islands, and political power

Politics is a reflection of the society of the moment and political power represents the social aspirations of change or continuity, taking into account the characteristics of the territory. Societies settled on islands are situated in peculiar territories, with their own perception of their place of residence. Living on an island generates situations not contemplated in continental territories, which can be summed up around the concept of insularity. Residing on an island implies a perception of one's own territory that is different from that of others (Gillis, 2014). Each island, whether it is part of a larger archipelago or not, is imbued with a series of common characteristics in different senses, such as economic, social, cultural, environmental or geographical (Ferdinand et al., 2020) and politics reflects all of the above. Insularity on a specific island will result from how these issues are combined (Estévez González, 1992). Insularity is present in island identity (Vézina, 2020). Based on the intense social connection with the island's own territory (Aznar Vallejo, 2016; Conkling, 2007), how a population is situated on its island will determine personal and programmatic ideological development offered in elections. This high sense of belonging orients island citizens politically (Anckar & Anckar, 1995).

An island, as a territory bounded by the sea, visibly reflects its border even as part of a larger archipelago. In this case, the sea is a natural boundary and pathway that also allows for connections with other territories, as well as the reception of external influences. Similarly, political and administrative structures are created in island territories that reflect their particularities. In an archipelago, the relationships between each of the islands, with commonalities and differences among them, revolve around the center-periphery dichotomy (Baldacchino, 2020). A capital is established on a specific island, concentrating in that city a range of services not available in the others due to the lack of administrative facilities that only come with being the capital of an archipelago. The capital of the archipelago on one island creates the consideration of the other territories as peripheral islands (Persoon & Osseweijer, 2002). This center-periphery dichotomy generates a constant to take into account, that of double insularity (García-Rodríguez et al., 2018) for islands that rely on their main island – effectively, their ‘mainland’ – for the receipt of goods and access to certain services (Boumpa & Paralikas, 2021). How this constant is perceived on a non-capital island will impact its island identity (Baldacchino, 2004). The relationships that arise from the consideration and implications of the existence of a centre and a periphery, and layers thereof, shape the relationships between the islands. These relationships can be positive, marked by cordiality and understanding; or negative, characterized by disagreements, tension, rivalry and conflict (Corbett, 2020). From these relationships, various views on archipelagic administrative units can be formed, which can give rise to insular nationalism (Baldacchino, 2002) or pseudo-ethnic insularism. Similarly, islands that are not political centres demand

political autonomy (Favole & Giordana, 2018; Vance Roitman & Veenendaal, 2022) based on the characteristics of insularity (Carranza Guasch, 2022).

Archipelagos form unified geographic units made up of several islands, more or less dispersed from each other, but each island maintains its own differences based on a unique territory, with a population scattered in various ways. In an archipelago, each island is a world in itself (Colom Pastor, 2001) and the population identifies, in the first place, with their island of belonging (Joan i Marí, 2002). Each island, as a delimited space, implies particular economic and social activities and the population is a key and essential part of these activities. Despite the fact that the sea unites the islands, it is also the starting point of separation between each of them (Bethel, 2002). These inter-island differences imply a difficult social perception of the archipelago as a cultural unitary whole (Picornell, 2014); and, in the same way, its youth may hardly know locations of their archipelago located outside their island of residence (Sebastián & Garau, 2022).

Each island configures its own government institutions, such as city councils for the different municipalities present, island councils that cover the entire island territory, and departments or provinces that can span more than one island. Membership in a sovereign state means that these institutions may be regulated by the state or by an entity that covers the entire archipelago. In any case, the development of institutions will give the islands a greater or lesser degree of autonomy based on administrative decentralization. The situation of the islands allows them to access a higher degree of self-government (Baldacchino, 2006). Islands in the European Union are generally divided into municipalities, provinces or departments established by the respective state, except for the Balearic and Canary Islands, which have an intermediate level of administration between island municipalities and the archipelago government, called "consells" and "cabildos" respectively. These island councils are adapted to the territory of each island and have competencies in various areas, making them the most representative institutions of insularity (Hernández Bravo de Laguna, 2000; Sarmiento Acosta, 2005). They serve as a support point for external and inter-island relations. In the Canary Islands, the cabildos are symbols of Canary Island identity (Galván Tudela & Estévez González, 1997) and represent the political-social unity and space for political transaction of each island (Domínguez Vila, 2018; Cioranescu, 1988).

The Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands. Two realities with island public administrations.

The Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands are two autonomous communities of Spain and regions of the European Union. The former is located in the Mediterranean Sea and the latter in the Atlantic Ocean. Despite the earlier settlement of the Balearic Islands compared to the Canary Islands, both have followed a similar trajectory in terms of their political and administrative organization. They are also two well-known tourist destinations (Báez-García, Flores-Muñoz & Gutiérrez-Barroso, 2018). Due to their more remote geographic position from the European continent, the Canary Islands are considered an ultra-peripheral region of the European Union. In 2021, the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands had a population of 1.173m and 2.173m respectively (Table 1). The city of Palma is the capital of the Balearic Islands, while the Canary Islands has two capital cities, Santa Cruz de Tenerife and Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. In the Balearic Islands, the official languages are Spanish and Catalan, which are also spoken in other territories. Meanwhile, in the Canary Islands, the official language is Spanish with a distinctive accent and unique vocabulary. The Balearic Islands are a province with the islands of Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza, and Formentera, while the Canary Islands are divided into two provinces: Santa Cruz de Tenerife (consisting of the islands of Tenerife, La Gomera, La Palma, and El Hierro) and Las Palmas (consisting of the islands of Gran Canaria, Fuerteventura, and Lanzarote). Each island has its own capital and island council.

Table 1. Population and area of each of the politically organized Balearic and Canary Islands.

Islands	Population at January 1, 1982	Population at January 1, 2021	Land area in km ²
Mallorca (B)	545.171	912.544	3.609,86
Menorca (B)	58.416	95.936	689,05
Ibiza (B)	62.033	152.820	567,51
Formentera (B)	4.319	11.708	82,08
BALEARIC IS.	669.939	1.173.008	5.014,00
Lanzarote (C)	52.894	156.189	845,94
Fuerteventura (C)	27.734	119.662	1.659,74
Gran Canaria (C)	641.610	852.688	1.560,10
Tenerife (C)	572.951	927.993	2.034,38
La Gomera (C)	19.051	21.734	369,76
La Palma (C)	78.036	83.380	708,32
El Hierro (C)	6.639	11.298	268,71
CANARY IS.	1.398.915	2.172.944	7.446,95

Source: Own elaboration with data from Instituto de Estadística de Canarias (2023a & 2023b), Institut d'Estadística de les Illes Balears (2023) and Institut Balear d'Economia (1983). (B): Balearic Islands. (C): Canary Islands. For an evolution of the population, 1982 is taken as a reference, as it was the first statute of autonomy approved in the two archipelagos. In 1982 the Statute of Autonomy of the Canary Islands was approved, while in 1983 the Statute of Autonomy of the Balearic Islands was approved.

The island councils, the government of each of the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands

Their creation and evolution

Each of the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands were conquered by the Crown of Aragon and the Crown of Castile, respectively. This process was completed in the Balearic Islands in 1287 with the conquest of Menorca (Serra Busquets, 2004) and in the Canary Islands in 1496 with the conquest of Tenerife. At that time, an island council was created on each island with similar functions, called *consell* in the Balearic Islands and *cabildo* in the Canary Islands, with each island considered as a single municipality (Hernández Bravo de Laguna, 2000). At that time, there was no institution that governed the archipelagos as a whole (Colom Pastor, 1998). These early island councils had executive, legislative and judicial functions. (Colom Pastor, 1978; Hernández Suárez, 2022). On the one hand, the consells were abolished in 1715 by the Decrees of Nueva Planta (Pons Bosch, 2008) issued by King Philip V of Spain with the aim of unifying the laws, political and administrative systems in the territories of the Crown of Aragon (including Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands). These decrees abolished autonomy and local freedoms, promoting centralism. On the other hand, the cabildos were eliminated in the early 19th century with the first approved Spanish Constitution in 1812, which stated that the archipelagos of the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands were two of the provinces that were part of Spain. This led to a new territorial organization of Spain and the islands. As they were provinces, it was necessary to choose which city would be the capital. In the Balearic Islands, the greater relevance of the island of Mallorca clearly suggested that its capital would be the city of Palma. But this scenario was not replicated in the Canary Islands. It was decided that the capital would be the city of Santa Cruz de Tenerife on the island of Tenerife, but there was a debate between this island and the island of Gran Canaria for the hegemony of the archipelago and the capital of the province was an important matter.

Once the provinces of the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands were created, a Provincial Council as the government and administration of the province was set up, serving as an intermediary between the Spanish government and the municipalities of each island. The province in Spain represented an administration similar to the French Departments with their corresponding capital, which was a novelty for the islands (Béthencourt Massieu, 1995). Meanwhile, in the Canary Islands, the political and economic elite of Gran Canaria were dissatisfied with the selection of Santa Cruz de Tenerife as the capital and began to request a change in capital city. This debate was not successful and the position shifted to defending the division of the province of the Canary Islands. The political and economic elite of Tenerife did not want the province to be divided. In an attempt to resolve the debate between the two islands, the Spanish Parliament in 1912 approved the creation of an island council with the name of the previous institution *cabildo* in each of the Canary Islands. The cabildos of each of the Canary Islands were the *first insular autonomous experience* (Trujillo Fernández in Acirón Royo, 1998). At the same time, the deputy Federico Llansó from Menorca proposed to articulate cabildos in each of the Balearic Islands, but his proposal was rejected (Quintana, 1977). Since then, the societies of the islands of Menorca and Ibiza have continued to demand the establishment of a similar system of government to the cabildos (Colom Pastor, 1998; Pons Fraga, 2019). The functions of the existing Provincial Council were assigned to the cabildos of the Canary Islands, these being: a) attending to the interests of each of the islands; b) maintaining and providing insular services such as spaces for charitable works and education, exhibitions, public works, roads and canals, lands and collection for their insular scope execution; c) reviewing the agreements of the municipalities, carrying out inspections on public services, budget and municipal archives of the municipalities; d) approving the creation and merger of municipalities; e) resolving appeals against decisions of municipalities on the registration of citizens; f) communicating to the highest representative of the state in the province, the Civil Governor, the ordinances approved by the municipalities on police matters; g) overseeing the accounts of the municipalities and proposing their approval to the Civil Governor; and h) resolving claims about local elections (Law of July 11, 1912, art. 5 & Provisional Regulation for the regime of the Island Councils). Each cabildo assumed the competencies of the Provincial Council, leaving it without content and resulting in its elimination in 1925 (Sarmiento Acosta, 2005). The creation of the cabildos did not succeed in smoothing out the tensions between the political and economic elites of the islands of Gran Canaria and Tenerife. As a result, in 1927, the province of the Canary Islands was divided into two: one with its capital in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (islands of Lanzarote, Fuerteventura and Gran Canaria) and another with its capital in Santa Cruz de Tenerife (islands of La Palma, El Hierro, La Gomera and Tenerife).

A few years later, in 1931, the Second Spanish Republic was established and the cabildos were included in its constitution (Rodríguez Rodríguez, 2004), maintaining the previously approved legislation regarding the cabildos (Hernández Bravo de Laguna, 2000). In the Balearic and Canary Islands, three autonomy statute projects were elaborated and debated. One of them was created in the island of Mallorca by the Association for the Culture of Mallorca, one in the island of Tenerife by Ramón Gil Roldán, and one in the island of Gran Canaria by Antonio Junco Toral. The first one did not succeed as it only included the islands of Mallorca, Ibiza and Formentera (Nadal, 1999) due to the rejection shown in Menorca (Colom Pastor, 1998; Quintana, 1977; Ripoll Escandell, 1999a; Serra Busquets, 1976); while the second and third projects were stopped because the Spanish Civil War began in 1936. Three years later, in 1939, a new political epoch began without democracy, during which the cabildos of the Canary Islands were maintained and local legislation at the time made it possible for the Balearic Islands to also be organized in the form of island councils (García Rojas, 1997). Thus, in 1975, with the last law of local regime of that political era, discussions about such possibility began, but the arrival of democracy changed things (Quintana, 1977) and the issue of the autonomy of the islands would expand to become an issue for the regions of mainland Spain.

Shortly before the approval of the 1978 Spanish Constitution, a pre-autonomous regime was established in each of the Spanish regions. In the Balearic Islands, this led to the creation, in the same year, of the island councils with the same name as the previous institution, the *consell* (Royal Decree-Law 18/1978, art. 4). A *consell* was created in Mallorca, Menorca, and Ibiza-Formentera, with these two islands being joined in the same entity. These *consells* took over the competences that until that moment had been held by the Provincial Council (Law 39/1978, art. 40), which was dissolved in 1979. If in the Canary Islands the *cabildos* emerged to reduce the rivalry between the two most populous islands, in the Balearic Islands the *consells* were created based on the desire for autonomy of the less populated islands (Colom Pastor, 2001). It is important to consider the deeply rooted insular identities and the fact that what is Balearic is identified with the province (Joan i Marí, 2002). The modern *consells* recovered the insular autonomy that had been lost in 1715 (Ripoll Escandell, 1999b). The *cabildos* are the predecessors to the *consells* (Colom Pastor & Marimon Riutort, 2003). The autonomy of the Balearic Islands was understood as the self-government of each of the islands (Pons Fraga, 1999). To complete the autonomy of the islands and to represent the entire archipelago, the Inter-island General Council was created in the Balearic Islands and the Canary Board in the Canary Islands, being dissolved upon the constitution of the first autonomous government of the archipelagos in 1983.

Pre-autonomy in the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands led to different debates about how to construct the future autonomous community, mainly concerning two issues: the integration of the *consells/cabildos* into the autonomous structure and the election of members to the autonomous parliament. Firstly, there were two distinct positions on whether to base the autonomous community on the *consells/cabildos*, with an autonomous government exercising a coordinating role, or to strengthen the regional government at the expense of the *consells/cabildos* (García Rojas, Peraza Padrón & García, 2001). Secondly, related to the first issue, the representation of the islands in the future autonomous parliament was debated, seeking a balance between the non-capital islands and the capital islands in both archipelagos, despite the population difference between them. This issue was resolved by ensuring a balance between each of the islands. These issues were addressed in the Statute of Autonomy of the Balearic Islands and the Statute of Autonomy of the Canary Islands, approved in 1983 and 1982 respectively.

Since the establishment of the first government of the Balearic Islands and the first government of the Canary Islands in 1983, following the first autonomous elections, the *consells/cabildos* have gone through different stages. In both archipelagos, their competences have been gradually expanded, based on transfers from the Autonomous Community and have been provided with a more consistent legal framework. On the one hand, in relation to their competences as local entities, they have remained stable with the legal changes that have taken place and remain in force today (Law 7/1985). On the other hand, regarding their competencies as institutions of the Autonomous Community, they have been reflected in the different reforms of the statutes of autonomy and the laws of *consells/cabildos*, also pointing out issues related to their internal organization. The latest laws of *consells/cabildos* in the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands were approved in 2022 and 2015 respectively (Law 4/2022 & Law 8/2015). The most significant change in this legislation, approved in 2007, is the creation of an island council on the island of Formentera separate from the island of Ibiza (Organic Law 1/2007, art. 63.2).

Today, the *consells/cabildos* are the highest representation of each of the islands, responsible for their government and administration (Law 7/1985, art. 41.1). Currently, each island has its own flag, coat of arms, an annual holiday for each of the Canary Islands, while each of the Balearic Islands can establish a day as its local holiday (Organic Law 1/2007, art. 6.2). It should be noted that it was difficult to establish a common holiday for all the islands at the same time. Given the particularities of each island, it was not easy to identify a common issue for each of the Balearic and Canary Islands. To achieve this, the same process that had led to the autonomy of both territories was considered. In this sense, the day for

all the Balearic Islands is March 1st, in memory of the day the Balearic Islands' Statute of Autonomy was approved in 1983; while the day for all the Canary Islands is May 30th, in memory of the first day the Canary Islands Parliament met in 1983. Similarly, each consell/cabildo awards recognitions and distinctions within the scope of its competencies (Royal Decree 2568/1986, art. 190).

Position of the island councils at the state level

The Spanish Constitution of 1978 acknowledges the previous evolution of the islands within the Spanish legal system and recognizes the islands as a particular territorial entity with the consells/cabildos as the island public administration (Spanish Constitution 1978, art. 141.4.). The islands are part of the local universe of the state with a direct line to the legislative power, since in the general elections, the islands constitute unique constituencies where they elect their own representatives in the Spanish Senate as a territorial representation chamber. While continental provinces such as Madrid or Barcelona elect four senators regardless of the evolution of their population, the islands also enjoy a fixed representation because the islands of Tenerife, Gran Canaria and Mallorca elect three senators each; while the (smaller) islands of Menorca, Ibiza-Formentera, Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, La Gomera, La Palma and El Hierro elect one senator each.

In addition, the cabildos of the Canary Islands enjoy a privilege established in the Statute of Autonomy of the Canary Islands and which the consells of the Balearic Islands do not have. While the Spanish Constitution establishes that autonomous parliaments can request a draft law from the Spanish government or send a motion for a law to the Spanish Parliament (Spanish Constitution 1978, art. 87.2), the Statute of Autonomy of the Canary Islands allows the cabildos to urge the Parliament of the Canary Islands to promote these agreements (Organic Law 1/2018, art. 18.3).

Position of the island councils at the autonomic level

The Statute of Autonomy of the Balearic Islands (approved in 1983) and the Statute of Autonomy of the Canary Islands (approved in 1982) define the role of the consells/cabildos as institutions of the Autonomous Community of the respective archipelagos. These laws articulate island autonomy starting from the recognition of insular geography and specificity, emphasizing that insularity deserves differentiated treatment (Organic Law 1/2007, art. 3 & Organic Law 1/2018, art. 3).

Each of the islands has legislative initiative and participates in the Parliament of the Balearic Islands and the Parliament of the Canary Islands in the General Commission of Island Councils (Law 10/2015; Organic Law 1/2007, art. 53 & Organic Law 1/2018, art. 41.5). In addition, members of the consells/cabildos can simultaneously be deputies in the Parliament of the Balearic Islands and the Parliament of the Canary Islands, giving greater relevance to their position. In the case of the Parliament of the Canary Islands, when at least two-thirds of the deputies elected on an island do not agree with a decision that is to be made because they believe it will not be beneficial to their home island, they may postpone the vote until the next meeting of the Plenary of the Parliament of the Canary Islands (Organic Law 1/2018, art. 41.6).

The consells/cabildos have legislative initiative, as noted earlier. On one hand, the consells of the Balearic Islands can propose a draft law to the Government of the Balearic Islands or submit a bill proposal to the Parliament of the Balearic Islands, which must be attended by a maximum of three councilors to defend it in the Plenary (Organic Law 1/2007, art. 47.2). On the other hand, the cabildos of the Canary Islands can also send proposals for bills to the Parliament of the

Canary Islands, with two of its councilors attending to defend it in the Plenary (Organic Law 1/2018, art. 44.2 & Regulation of the Canary Islands Parliament, art. 140).

The General Commission of Island Councils is the forum for consells/cabildos in the Parliaments of the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands. While the former has a deliberative and informative role and is composed of members of both the Parliament of the Balearic Islands and the consells (Regulation of the General Commission of Insular Councils, arts. 1 and 2), the latter has a decisive function on the matters discussed and only the cabildo's president is present with a voice but without a vote (Regulation of the Canary Islands Parliament, arts. 42.1 and 60.4). The Canary Islands' version was an alternative to a hypothetical new territorial representation chamber in the Parliament of the Canary Islands (Peraza Padrón, 2004; Trujillo Fernández, 2003), and it is the only parliamentary commission that is included in the Statute of Autonomy of the Canary Islands (Ruano León, 1999). In both cases, members of the Governments of the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands can attend the commission with a voice but without a vote (Regulation of the General Commission of Insular Councils, art. 13.4 & Regulation of the Canary Islands Parliament, art. 42.5). The different functions of the commission in each parliament mean that the topics discussed are dissimilar. In the Parliament of the Canary Islands, agreements or plans between the Government of the Canary Islands and the cabildos are addressed, as well as legislative initiatives that may deal with some issues specific to the cabildos (Regulation of the Canary Islands Parliament, art. 63). Additionally, in the Parliament of the Balearic Islands, the possible reform of the Statute of Autonomy, the propositions of law sent by the consells, as well as matters related to the Government of the Balearic Islands and the Consells, are discussed (Regulation of the General Commission of Insular Councils, art. 8).

The Presidents of the consells/cabildos also participate in the Conference of Presidents, along with the President of the Government of the Balearic Islands or the President of the Government of the Canary Islands. This conference aims to share, debate and reach consensus on matters of mutual interest (Organic Law 1/2007, art. 74 & Organic Law 1/2018, art. 74). Additionally, in the Canary Islands, there is a Council of Insular Collaboration made up of 14 members (seven from the Government of the Canary Islands and one from each cabildo) (Decree 97/2016, art. 3) that serves as a stable body for collaboration between the represented public administrations. The main focus of this council is to address agreements on the transfer of competences to the cabildos and the necessary resources to successfully implement them (Law 8/2015, art. 128.3).

The cabildos of the Canary Islands, through their president, represent the Government of the Canary Islands in each of the islands, as long as no member of the regional executive is present (Organic Law 1/2018, art. 20.2).

In addition to legal provisions, the consells/cabildos are grouped together in the Canary Islands in the Canarian Federation of Islands, which is recognized as an interlocutor with the Government of the Canary Islands (Law 8/2015, First Additional Provision). In the Balearic Islands, they are grouped together in the Balearic Islands Federation of Local Entities, which is shared with the municipalities.

Position of the island councils at the local level

It is at the national level where the role of the consells/cabildos as local institutions is specified. Given that their position covers the entirety of an island, it is the duty of the consells/cabildos to coordinate with the municipalities located there and provide support in various issues. In the case of municipalities with a population of less than 20,000 inhabitants, it is the consell/cabildo that assumes part of their competencies as local institutions such as the storage and management of waste, access of citizens to the potable water service, management of wastewater, access roads to populated areas of the municipality, cleaning, lighting, and asphaltting of streets (Law 7/1985, art. 26.2). Likewise, in the event that a

municipality cannot manage the census of citizens on its own, the consells/cabildos themselves will take care of it (Law 7/1985, art. 17.1). The relationship between the consells/cabildos and the municipalities on each island is even deeper in the case of the Canary Islands, as the approval of the cabildo is necessary for the creation of a new municipality. Even in the case of a union between municipalities, a report from the cabildo is required (Law 7/2015, arts. 14.4 and 15.3).

The attention to municipal particularities is addressed through the development of island cooperation plans by the consells/cabildos. These plans include investments to be made in different municipalities on the island (Law 4/2022, art. 107 & Law 8/2015, art. 14). Additionally, in each of the Balearic Islands, a council of mayors is created to address issues that go beyond a single municipality (Law 4/2022, art. 108).

As local institutions, the consells/cabildos also participate in provincial bodies. The Balearic Islands form a single province and do not have such a possibility, but the Canary Islands are divided into two provinces, as previously mentioned and in each province an Inter-island Provincial Association is established. These bodies are formed by the presidents of the cabildos in each province and are chaired by the person holding the presidency of the cabildo where the provincial capital is located (islands of Gran Canaria and Tenerife) (Royal Decree 2568/1986, art. 75.1). They represent the provincial interests, but in the islands they have no specific function beyond this and have remained without any apparent use or activity (Hernández Bravo de Laguna, 2000).

The election of members of the island councils

Members of the consells/cabildos are known as councillors, and are elected every four years through closed and blocked lists using the d'Hondt method. The electoral district is each island, and the electoral lists must maintain a gender balance with each gender occupying at least 40% of the seats (Organic Law 5/1985, art. 44 bis). To be eligible for a seat, a political party must receive at least 5% of the valid votes. These elections coincide with local elections for municipalities and autonomic elections for the Parliaments of the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands.

Table 2. Number of members of the consells/cabildos.

Island	Members	
Mallorca (B)	33	Permanent number
Menorca (B)	13	
Ibiza (B)	13	
Formentera (B)	17	Based on the number of inhabitants: Up to 100 (3), from 101 to 250 (5), from 251 to 1000 (7), from 1001 to 2000 (9), from 2001 to 5000 (11), from 5001 to 10000 (13), from 10001 to 20000 (17), from 20001 to 50000 (21), from 50001 to 100000 (25), and from 100001 for each 100000 people or part thereof, 1 councilor more is added, and if the final number is even, 1 councilor more is added.
Lanzarote (C)	23	Based on the number of inhabitants: Up to 10,000 (11 councilors), from 10,001 to 20,000 (13 councilors), from 20,001 to 50,000 (17 councilors), from 50,001 to 100,000 (21 councilors), and from 100,001 for each 100,000 people or fraction 1 more councilor, and if the final number is even, 1 more councilor is added.
Fuerteventura (C)	23	
Gran Canaria (C)	29	
Tenerife (C)	27	
La Gomera (C)	17	
La Palma (C)	21	
El Hierro (C)	13	

Source: Own elaboration based on the legislation mentioned previously. (B): Balearic Islands. (C): Canary Islands.

While it is true that the consells/cabildos of the two archipelagos share a common island-wide relevance, their election process is not the same. In the case of the Balearic Islands, the members of the consells do not change regardless of the evolution of each island and are subject to autonomic regulation in this regard (Law 7/2009, art. 7), except for the particularity of the island of Formentera, whose members are elected according to the procedure established for municipalities under state legislation (Organic Law 5/1985, art. 179). Meanwhile, the number of members of the cabildos of the Canary Islands adapts to the evolution of the population and is subject to state legislation (Organic Law 5/1985, art. 201.1).

After the elections, the candidates elected by the citizens to represent them in their consell/cabildo take office and choose their president. The cabildos of the Canary Islands are the only institution in Spain in which the preference of the citizens is maintained when electing the Presidency, since the person who headed the candidacy that obtained the most votes from the citizens is automatically elected the President of the cabildo (Organic Law 5/1985, art. 201.5). However, the election of the Presidents of the consells of the Balearic Islands is closer to the system of election of the Presidents of the Autonomous Communities mentioned above, as the individuals who have headed a candidacy must collect the signatures of the councilors and the person who has obtained the most signatures (in case of a tie, it will be the person who leads a candidacy with a higher number of votes from the citizens) will be subjected to a first vote, needing to obtain an absolute majority or, failing that, a simple majority in a second vote. Successive proposals can be made for a maximum of 48 hours following the first vote. If 48 hours have elapsed since the first vote and no candidate has achieved such support, the person who led the candidacy with the highest number of votes from the citizens will be appointed President (Law 7/2009, Second Transitory Provision). The person who holds the Presidency of a consell/cabildo is addressed as Honourable (Royal Decree 2568/1986, art. 34).

Organization of the island councils

The consells/cabildos are equipped with a series of bodies that allow their functioning: the Plenary, the Presidency, the Vice-presidencies and the Government Council. Each consell/cabildo is equipped with a regulation of organization and operation that clarifies the internal life of the institution (Sarmiento Acosta, 2005).

The elected councilors form part of the Plenary, as the highest collegial body of citizen representation (Law 4/2022, art. 15 & Law 8/2015, art. 52.1). Likewise, the councilors are grouped into political groups formed by the members of each political party represented there, thus being distributed in the Plenary. All councilors from political parties that have obtained less than 3 councilors in the Canary Islands (Law 8/2015, art. 86.1 and 86.2) or less than 2 councilors in the Balearic Islands (Law 4/2022, art. 12.2) will be part of the so-called Mixed Group, which is unique for all those councilors regardless of their origin. The Plenary performs functions of control over the other bodies of the insular council, approves the regulation of organization and functioning as well as other regulations, approves the creation of new municipalities, decides on the insular flag or shield, determines the economic resources by approving the budget of the consell/cabildo and its taxes, approves the insular plan for territorial planning, accepts the transfer of competences in favor of the consell/cabildo, establishes the managed public services, among other issues (Law 4/2022, art. 17 & Law 8/2015, art. 53). The Plenary also has commissions, that is, spaces where councilors are responsible for studying a specific issue. These commissions are made up of councilors belonging to all political groups in proportion to their representation in the Plenary. Also, the President of the consell/cabildo and the councilors who serve as spokespersons for political groups are part of the Board of Spokespersons, which is responsible for specifying the items on the agenda of the Plenary sessions.

The President of a consell/cabildo is the most important position and personifies the highest representation of the consell/cabildo. They preside over the plenary sessions, order the session, and moderate the debate. They also direct and coordinate the work of the government, choose the Vice-presidents of the consell/cabildo, organize the insular administration, among other issues (Law 4/2022, art. 21 & Law 8/2015, art. 57). The Vice-presidents replace the President and assume the management of a specific area of the government of the consell/cabildo. The President and Vice-presidents are part of the government of the consell/cabildo along with the other councilors with government responsibility. It is possible for a person who was not elected by the citizens to serve as a councilor and be part of the government of the consell/cabildo (Law 4/2022, art. 26.2 & Law 8/2015, art. 60.2).

Competencies of the island councils

The competencies of the consells/cabildos in each of the Balearic and Canary Islands conform to their dual status as local and autonomous institutions. In any case, each consell/cabildo has the power to organize and regulate issues within its own competencies, to develop taxes, to plan public policies, to sanction or review its own agreements (Royal Decree 2568/1986, art. 4.1 & Law 7/1985, art. 4.1). In addition to the competencies previously mentioned, the consells/cabildos are responsible for the following matters under the transfer of powers from the Autonomous Community: a) culture; b) economic planning and development; c) fairs; d) groundwater; e) historical, artistic and archaeological heritage; f) hunting; g) mountains, livestock trails, and pastures; h) museums and libraries; i) promotion and dissemination of cultural activities; j) promotion of crafts; k) promotion of sports activities; l) public gender policies; m) road transport; n) roads; o) shows; p) social welfare and social services; q) surface water; r) tourism activities; and s) urban planning of the island territory (Organic Law 1/2007, art. 71 & Organic Law 1/2018, art. 70).

As the consells and cabildos belong to two different autonomous communities, certain competences have been assumed on each archipelago that are not contemplated in the other. The consells also have competences in: a) adoption of minors, protection, and safeguarding; b) canals and irrigation systems; c) conservatory of music; d) cooperatives and chambers of commerce; e) development of spaces for the sale of artisanal products; f) education; g) elaboration and development of public youth policies; h) forest exploitation; i) healthcare; j) management of island statistics; k) management of legal deposit of books; l) monitoring the quality of agricultural products; m) monitoring the quality of fishery product; n) monitoring the quality of livestock products; o) promotion of the creation of craft businesses; p) technical inspection of vehicles; q) treatment of non-contributory social security supplement; r) volunteering; s) water theme parks (Organic Law 1/2007, art. 71). Meanwhile the cabildos also have competences in: a) advice and support for agricultural activities; b) animal health sanitation; c) aquaculture; d) attention to social inequalities; e) consumer protection; f) innovative farms; g) island markets; h) management of sports and refuge ports; i) modification of municipalities: creation, merger, and naming; j) social protection; k) student residences; l) transport by cable and railway (Organic Law 1/2018, art. 70).

Similarly, the consells/cabildos, as local institutions, have taken on the competences of the Provincial Councils, which are as follows: a) assume the maintenance and cleaning of healthcare centres located in municipalities with less than 5000 inhabitants through a coordination agreement with the autonomous community; b) if the island council identifies a cost that exceeds the services it is already providing, it will offer its collaboration to manage those services more efficiently; c) to assist and cooperate with municipalities on legal, economic or technical matters. For municipalities with less than 1000 inhabitants, the island council will be responsible for the services of intervention and secretariat; d) to assist and ensure that municipalities can fully develop their competences; e) to assist municipalities with less than 20,000 inhabitants in tax collection and financial management; f) to assume the provision of public services throughout

the island; g) to attend to the prevention and extinction of fires in municipalities with less than 20,000 inhabitants if the municipality cannot handle it; h) to cooperate in promoting the economic and social development of the island by planning the territory; i) to oversee the cost of services provided by the municipalities; j) to participate in the economic and financial plan of a municipality that does not maintain budget stability; k) To promote and coordinate the provision of public services in a unified manner by municipalities (Law 7/1985, arts. 31, 36.1 and 116 bis).

Analysis

The evolution of autonomy in the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands provides a distinct example of political decentralization, with the consells/cabildos serving as manifestations of this evolution. Despite being geographically separated, these institutions, as previously noted, share many commonalities. Being both local and regional entities, they have assumed substantial competencies and responsibilities, playing a pivotal role in the management of island-specific matters.

On the one hand, the consells/cabildos have the advantage of being the quintessential island government. Leveraging the unique cultural and geographical characteristics of each island, and empowered by their autonomy and self-governance, they make decisions on various matters tailored to their specific needs, such as public services and island planning. Furthermore, these decisions are made in collaboration with the municipalities of the islands, particularly the less populated ones, as they take on some of their responsibilities as their own.

On the other hand, the consells/cabildos face the disadvantage of serving as an intermediary between municipalities and the autonomous government, which can create additional challenges in reaching shared agreements or distributing economic resources for matters affecting all three levels of government. In this regard, differing political affiliations in municipalities, consells/cabildos, and autonomous governments can lead to varying priorities on common issues. Similarly, consells/cabildos in less populated islands may have limited capacity to act due to more constrained economic resources compared to more populous islands. These economic challenges may be compounded depending on the extent of economic dependency on the state and autonomous government, further restricting the potential actions of the consells/cabildos.

Given their distinct competencies, consells/cabildos may have limited influence on matters outside their jurisdiction. At the European community level, they operate within the framework of the European Union as political and administrative subdivisions of a member state. In this regard, the European Union does not directly engage with consells/cabildos, but it does establish overarching policies and guidelines that member states must adhere to, which can have implications for all levels of government, including the island level. Consells/cabildos are subject to EU laws and regulations through the Government of Spain and autonomous governments, ensuring the implementation of EU policies. Specifically, the cabildos in the Canary Islands, being located in an outermost region of the European Union, receive special treatment, including funds designed to help offset the costs associated with their remote geographic location and promote economic and social development in the islands. Additionally, the islands are not subject to certain EU measures in sectors such as agriculture.

The future of consells/cabildos involves maintaining their role as the government of each island while potentially expanding their competencies. These institutions will continue to play a significant part in planning and developing public policies for each island and their respective archipelagos. This will be possible through coordination and cooperation among themselves, facilitated by established bodies such as the Canarian Federation of Islands or the

Federation of Local Entities in the Balearic Islands. The coordination and cooperation among consells/cabildos are crucial for their cohesion and the sustainable development of the islands, given the vital role that tourism plays in the insular economies.

The evolution of autonomy in the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands, with consells/cabildos, can offer valuable lessons and examples for other regions in Spain. While in the islands, consells/cabildos serve as an intermediate level of government between the autonomous government and municipalities, in mainland Spain, there are Provincial Councils that could potentially expand their competencies along the lines of consells/cabildos. Beyond Spain, the evolution of consells/cabildos serves as an example of how to distribute competencies in island environments.

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Conclusion

The Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands enjoy an administrative peculiarity in the insular universe based on the identities of each island: their island councils, the *consells* and the *cabildos* respectively. Both structure the island as the insular power they are. Their creation was uneven in both archipelagos, but their political evolution since the approval of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 has placed them in a similar position, and the autonomous legislation subsequently passed has equally situated them in the structure of the corresponding Autonomous Community with identical relevance. Consells and cabildos maintain more similarities than differences. At the same time, they are local institutions and autonomous institutions with their own competences and their own approaches to developing them on each island.

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