Towards a new participative model?

Institutional participation and grass-roots mobilisation in Barcelona under the crisis

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Cover photo by Ricard Cugat: illustrating the community management space "Can Batlló" and the struggle of the neighbours of La Bordeta in Barcelona. *El Periódico Barcelona*. June 12, 2011.
http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/barcelona/bordeta-paso-mas-conquista-pacifica-can-batllo-1040054

TRANSGOB: Transformations of urban governance in the context of the crisis. Evolution and prospects for participative governance in Spain and the UK

The TRANSGOB project addresses the impact of the economic crisis on forms of urban governance in Spain, contrasting the Spanish experience with that of the United Kingdom. It aims to analyse how practices of participative governance are evolving and their future prospects in a context marked by budget austerity, social conflict and political crisis. In more general terms, we want to explore the implications of such dynamics of change for the relations between state and non-state actors at the local level.
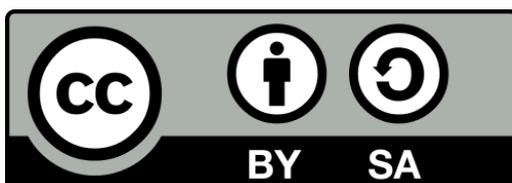
Introduction

During the years before the 2007-08 crisis, the topic of citizen participation in local governance aroused strong interest in political, social and academic circles throughout Catalonia and Spain. Different parties of distinct political colours started to talk about the need to put into practice innovative formulae for citizen participation in local policymaking, as a way to complement and enrich existing representative institutions. Social movements inspired by the World Social Forums and by emblematic cases of participative democracy such as Brazilian participatory budgeting, claimed that another democracy (more participative, less technocratic) was possible (De Sousa Santos, 2006). In the academic field, several research groups specialized in the study of participative democracy and analysed and accompanied a myriad of participative experiments at the local level, like citizen juries, deliberative opinion polls, participatory budgets and participative planning (Font, 2001). Together with university teams, a number of private consultancies focussed on the planning, management and assessment of participative processes that proliferated during those years.

The case of Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia, clearly exemplifies all these trends. Collaborative and participative governance has been one of the flagships of Barcelona's City Council since the end of the 1980s, becoming a reference point for many other municipalities in the country. Through the modification of its 'Norms of Regulation of Citizen Participation in 2003', the City Council of Barcelona tried to put in order the plethora of mechanisms of public participation that had been set up in the years before by multiple districts and departments. The City Council of Barcelona presented itself (and was often recognised) in international forums as a reference model in the field of participative democracy. Many social organisations actively engaged in 'invited' spaces of citizen participation (Blakeley, 2005; 2010) which did not necessarily entail that they were enthusiastic supporters of such mechanisms. Other more critical social movements simply rejected engagement with them, or were never invited to become involved.

How have relations between the local political institutions and citizens evolved in the context of the crisis? Is participative democracy still an important topic in the local political agenda or has it lost its momentum? Can we observe more, less, or simply distinct opportunities for citizen engagement? How are these shifts related to the crisis, to austerity and to government change? And what are the theoretical implications of these shifts?

This report analyses the evolution of the relations between local political institutions and the citizens in Barcelona in the context of the crisis. Our main argument is that the crisis has had a paradoxical effect. On the one hand, formal structures of citizen participation in local policymaking have lost strength, insofar as they tend to be perceived as a significant component of an 'old politics' which needs to be renovated in depth. On the other hand, the crisis and the 15M movement have stimulated the development of new participative dynamics in the city, giving place to the emergence of new socio-political actors, who have reinvigorated the debate on the alternatives to the existing democratic system – including the existing participatory channels. Participative democracy, in this context, tends to be seen both as part of the problem and of the solution.

Between February 2013 and May 2015, we held a total of 30 interviews. Seven in the exploratory phase, 12 in the phase one and 11 in phase two. We interviewed 12 senior local government officers (coded SO 1-12) from different areas such as participation, housing, welfare and social services. Two of them were interviewed both in the exploratory phase and the second phase. Five representatives of the third sector were interviewed (coded TS 1-5), from organisations that deal with issues of poverty and social needs. We held interviews with four members of community-based organisations (coded CBO 1-4) as neighbourhood associations and community-managed spaces. We also interviewed six anti-austerity activists from social movements which mobilized against housing evictions and social exclusion (coded A 1-6).

We begin this paper by briefly reviewing the impacts of the crisis and austerity in the city of Barcelona. Subsequently, we propose an analytical framework for the analysis of the trajectories of participative governance, based on the distinction of participative 'rules', 'practices' and 'narratives' (Lowndes and Roberts 2013: 46-76). In the third section, we analyse governance traditions in the city, placing the emphasis on the relations of collaboration and engagement between local institutions and the citizens. The fourth and the fifth part of the paper are devoted to the analysis of changes in grass-roots participation and formal mechanisms of participation and collaboration under austerity. Following that, we analyse these trends in depth through the observation of two sub-case studies that we offer as paradigmatic examples of changes in the city's governance – the management of the housing crisis and the community appropriation and management of abandoned urban lots. These two topics are illustrative of the general dynamics of social re-appropriation of the physical dimension of the city. The social response to housing evictions and the social use of urban spaces shows a set of practices that challenge the hegemonic understanding of urban space as an asset embodying an exchange value. The political articulation of such new insights in relation to urban space has given place to new forms of collaboration (not without tensions and contradictions) between grass-roots movements and institutional participation. We close this report with a concluding section in which we stress the empirical and theoretical lessons that we can draw from this case study.

1. Crisis and austerity in post-bubble Barcelona

The impacts of the economic crisis in Barcelona have been significant in terms of unemployment, poverty and socio-spatial inequalities. However, thanks to a high degree of internationalisation and diversification of the economy, these impacts have been less notable than in the country as a whole.

The productive structure of the Barcelona metropolitan area – with highly diversified and internationalised industrial and service sectors – no longer guarantees that the capital can remain immune to the economic downturn affecting Spain (Barcelona Economia, 2013). Between 2008 and 2013, the dependence on the construction sector was compensated by the strength of the export industry, the rise of tourism and an extension and specialization of the tertiary sector. However, some traditional sectors such as commerce and financial

sectors, which have a notable relative weight, began to decline with the crisis (Barcelona Economia, 2013).

Unemployment in Barcelona has grown from 8.4% in 2008 to 16.3% in 2014. However, the unemployment rate is higher in Catalonia (24.1%) and even higher in Spain as a whole (26.2%). The at-risk-of-poverty rate (AROPE index) was 17% in 2014 (26% in Catalonia and 29.2% in Spain)[1] and spatial inequalities in Barcelona increased deeply between 2007 and 2014 (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2014). One of the indexes that clearly expresses how the social gap between richer and poorer neighbourhoods has increased is the Family Disposable Income Index (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2014). According to this index, the average income of the families living in the Pedralbes neighbourhood (Les Corts district) is seven times higher than in the most vulnerable neighbourhoods in Barcelona such as Trinitat Nova or Ciutat Meridiana (Nou Barris district). The distribution of the costs of the crisis among different social groups and urban areas is significantly uneven.

As for the state of public finances, the debt of Barcelona City Council is moderate (688.7€ per capita in 2013) and its public finances are in a much better state than in other big cities like Madrid (with a 2193.7€ per capita debt in 2013). The City Council of Barcelona closed the year in 2012 with a surplus of 60 million euros, 2013 with a surplus of 139.3 million euros and 2014 with 22.2 million euros. This notwithstanding, the conservative government of Convergència i Unió (CiU) (2011-2015) showed a strong commitment to austerity. Some of the respondents of this study criticise the conservative government for having committed itself to austerity for ideological reasons and for not taking advantage of budget surpluses to strengthen social policies.

2. Participatory governance as rules, discourses and practices

The literature on participatory governance has tended to focus upon an assessment of the formal mechanisms initiated by public institutions in order to allow citizens to participate in the process of public decision-making. In fact, the traditional definition of 'citizen participation' that emerges from some of the literature produced *in* and *about* Barcelona, has tended to associate the notion of participation with the formal mechanisms designed by public institutions (Bonet, 2012). Our aim in this case study is to analyse not only formal citizen participation mechanisms, but also the narratives (or discourses) on which practices of participation are founded and the political practices within which they are embedded.

The analytical distinction between rules, practices and narratives suggested by Lowndes and Roberts (2013: 46-76) can be of great help in this regard. These authors distinguish three

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[1] http://premsa.gencat.cat/pres_fsvp/AppJava/notapremsavw/287043/ca/20-9-poblacio-catalana-troba-llindar-risc-pobresa-lany-2014.do

different ways through which institutions enable, shape and constrain social and political behaviour:

Rules are formally codified and constructed; examples of this are formal structures and mechanisms of citizen participation developed in the frame of more or less specific legislation or regulation. In our case study, we can find some examples such as the Barcelona Social Housing Council or ad-hoc participatory processes that operate in different districts, such as the participative process for the elaboration of the Municipal Action Plan and the 'Pla Buits', a plan that promotes the community management of urban lots owned by the City Council.

Practices are 'demonstrated through conduct', enacted through 'consistent rehearsal', adopted via observation and re-creation, and sanctioned through 'displays of disapproval' and 'social isolation' (Lowndes and Roberts 2013: 52-53). In Barcelona, we can find a long tradition of grassroots participation with an important role in the participatory governance of the city such as neighbourhood associations, third sector organizations or social urban movements. There is an established practice of public-community collaboration within and around formal mechanisms of participation that has contributed to the generation and the consolidation of a set of habits and behaviours.

Narratives are 'expressed through the spoken word', enacted through 'explanation and persuasion', and adopted via 'shared understandings' (Lowndes and Roberts 2013: 52). They are sanctioned through incomprehension and ridicule, and through attempts to undermine the reputation and credibility of non-conformists. One of the most important governance narratives during the 80s and 90s in Barcelona was the importance of inter-sectoral consensus and collaboration for the urban transformation of the city. This narrative put an emphasis on the need for collaboration between all actors (public, private and community) and the necessity of developing different formal collaborative arrangements such as public-private partnerships, intergovernmental consortia and citizen participation tools.

According to this analytical distinction, we could define participative governance as set of rules (norms and formal structures of citizen engagement), discourses (ideas and beliefs with regards to local democracy and grassroots participation) and practices (attitudes, behaviours and relations between social and state actors, within and beyond formal arenas of participation) that enable, shape and constrain citizen engagement in public (urban) affairs.

Lowndes and Roberts argue that 'institutional change emerges out of the interstices between rules, practices and narratives; just as stability arises from their alignment' (Lowndes and Roberts 2013: 73-4). Our hypothesis, based on the accumulated research data collected during the period 2011-2015, is that the mismatches between, on the one hand, the old formal structures of participation and traditional participatory discourses, and on the other hand, the practices of the new grassroots urban movements, have widened significantly during this period. These mismatches are producing incremental changes in the governance of the city, such as the emergence of new political subjects; a radical change in the balance of political forces; and the beginning of a new government that promotes a fresh model of (participatory) governance for the city.

Alongside these changes, we can observe in Barcelona the emergence of a new discourse articulated around the notion of 'co-responsibility', which emerges out of a mix of new governance beliefs and different types of critiques of the conventional mechanisms and practices of citizen engagement. Co-responsibility – which has been defined by different respondents as a way of consolidating a social democratic municipalism in Barcelona – is understood as the co-production of public policies between social movements, citizens and public institutions. Social activists insist that this approach also entails the enhancement of public accountability and policy evaluation mechanisms.

3. Governance traditions. Participation and collaboration in Barcelona

The city of Barcelona has undergone profound transformations since the first democratic elections in 1979. Such transformations have to do with the evolution of the general conditions in the country (democratization, accession to the EU, expansion of the welfare state, etc.), but they are also related to the urban policies carried out during this period by successive local governments.

From the first municipal elections in 1979 until 2011, the City Council of Barcelona was run by a coalition of progressive parties led by the PSC (Partit Socialista de Catalunya) with different city mayors belonging to this party (Narcís Serra, Pasqual Maragall, Joan Clos and Jordi Hereu). During this period, the socialist government received the support of ICV-EUiA (Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds – Esquerra Unida i Alternativa), a political organization that comes from the communist tradition and currently describes itself as an eco-socialist coalition. ICV-EUiA took on important positions in the city government such as the Secretaries for Social Welfare and Environment. In some periods, this government coalition also included a centre-left pro-independence party called ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya). This political situation changed in 2011, when CiU (Convergència i Unió), a conservative nationalist coalition, won the municipal elections for the first time. The City Mayor during this period (2011-2015) was Xavier Trias. Without an absolute majority, CiU needed the support of other political parties to pass important measures such as the municipal budget. The main ally of this government was PP (Partido Popular) – the right-wing party that currently runs the government of Spain. This point is important for our study, insofar as it forces us to wonder whether shifts in governance modes are mainly explained by the 'crisis' or by the change of government.

As we have noted above, during 2015, there has been another important change in institutional trajectory of Barcelona. The last local elections, held in May 2015, were won by Barcelona en Comú (Barcelona in Common), a political coalition led by a citizen-based platform called Guanyem Barcelona (Let's win Barcelona). Barcelona en Comú was supported by other new citizen platforms and parties such as Procés Constituent and Podemos, and one of the traditional left-wing parties, ICV-EUiA, that had been member of the government coalition with the Socialist party for more than two decades. Ada Colau, a very popular social activist in Barcelona and co-founder of the Platform for People Affected

by Mortgages (PAH), has been one of the fundamental drivers of this change in the representative politics of the city. Barcelona en Comú won the last local elections with a simple majority. This change entails a return to the tradition of progressive governments of the city. Although we do not analyse this new period, we can interpret the emergence and the victory of Barcelona en Comú as a result of the kind of changes in citizen engagement we investigate in this report.

The urban policies implemented in the democratic period, especially from the mid 1980s until the change of government, have given shape to what is known as the 'Barcelona Model' – a model that, among other aspects, is characterized by continued collaboration between the public, the private and the community sectors (Casellas, 2006; 2014; Blanco, 2009; 2013). Collaborative arrangements in Barcelona include different forms of cooperation between different tiers of government, such as public consortia in fields like education, social welfare and housing; metropolitan-wide arrangements for inter-municipal strategic planning and the joint delivery of services like waste management and public transportation; public-private partnerships in issues like urban regeneration and infrastructures building; and, importantly, a plethora of mechanisms of citizen participation at the city, district and the neighbourhood level.

Many of these participative mechanisms were set up under the umbrella of the 'Rules of Decentralization and Participation' of 1986. In 2003, these rules were updated and modified as a result of the political will of the government to give a new boost to participative mechanisms and to adapt them to the new socio-political reality. In the context of these rules, the main participative modalities in Barcelona at present are as follows:

- A dense network of consultative bodies, made up of the representatives of the City Council, invited experts and the main social organizations. Such bodies meet up on a regular basis. There is one City forum and a myriad of thematic forums at the city, district and neighbourhood levels. Examples of this are the Barcelona Social Welfare Forum and the Barcelona Social Housing Forum (see below).

- A number of ad-hoc participatory processes linked to different types of local policies like strategic planning, urban planning, neighbourhood regeneration and social welfare. Such processes combine different types of participative methods like on-line consultations, opinion polls, workshops, and monitoring committees. A significant example of this is the participative preparation of the PAM (Municipal Action Plan), which defines the strategic lines of local government's action during its term in office.

- Different types of participatory mechanisms, such as citizen workshops, citizen juries, public hearings and public consultations for specific public decisions and for the exchange of information with the citizens on specific matters. Two examples of this are the public hearings on public budgets and tax ordinances, and urban remodelling projects like Gardunya Square in Raval, Eïvissa square in Horta and 'Compromís per les Glòries'.

- Different kinds of 'agreements' or 'partnerships' between the City Council and social organizations in fields like social inclusion, sustainability, employment and transport.

An emblematic example of this is the 'Citizen Agreement for an Inclusive Barcelona' (*Acord Ciutadà per una Barcelona Inclusiva*), set up in 2005.

- A number of community actions spread all over the city ('Community Development Plans' and other more specific initiatives like time banks and community exchange networks). Such initiatives are carried out by public services and community organisations at neighbourhood level, under the umbrella of the 'Municipal Framework for Community Action' passed in 2005.

- Community management of public facilities like civic, cultural and youth centres (Ateneu Popular de Nou Barris, Centre Cultural Toni Guida, Ateneu Flor de Maig, etc.), usually on the basis of a bilateral agreement between the local administration and civic (non-profit) organisations and platforms.

The complexity of participative structures mirrors the density, diversity and vitality of community organisations and social movements in the city. Barcelona has a long tradition of grass-roots participation, and these practices have been evident in periods such as the struggles for urban improvement in the last years of the Franco regime (60s-70s); the no-global mobilisations of the 1990s; and the more recent mobilisations under the umbrella of the 15M movement, also known as the *Indignados* movement. More concretely, we can distinguish between three main types of social and community organisations:

- Neighbourhood associations, which were founded and gained great importance in the context of the late Francoism (60s and 70s). Such organisations have continued to play a very important role in the democratic context, although they are significantly weaker than they were at their origin. However, as we will explain below, the upsurge of the 15M has contributed to the revitalisation of the neighbourhood movement in recent years.

- A dense network of third sector organizations which develop their activity on the basis of volunteerism (often with public aid) in fields like social care, housing, social economy, culture and education.

- A myriad of urban social movements, which maintain strong relations with the no-global movement as well as with the Federation of Neighbourhood Associations of Barcelona (FAVB) and other community organisations at district level. Such movements are also involved in more recent mobilisations like the 15M (the *Indignados* movement) and 'new urban activism' (Walliser, 2013) such as the movement against housing evictions, or communities reclaiming empty urban spaces for social use (see below).

These diverse social movements and organisations have tended to establish different types of relations with local political institutions and the local administration. In general terms, urban social movements tend to be very critical of the 'Barcelona Model' of urban development and have established conflictual relations with local institutions, despite some subsequent episodes of agreement and collaboration, for example with regard to the citizen (self)management of some public facilities. Such movements, however, tend to be very critical of the formal participative structures, staying out of bodies like city-wide

consultative forums. Third sector organisations, in contrast, tend to get involved in formal mechanisms and maintain cooperative relations with public administration by means of both bilateral and multilateral agreements. The relations between neighbourhood associations and public institutions have oscillated between episodes of conflict and collaboration - sometimes through patronage-type relations with the main political parties. In this new cycle of grassroots mobilizations, these traditional forms of collaboration – challenging or conflicting with institutions – are contributing new ways of leading change in participatory local governance. As one of those responsible for a public program encouraging urban participation stressed during our interview:

> 'in a very simplified diagnosis, since these processes are more complex, we could say that the neighbourhood associations want to develop a task control, supervision and accountability of what local government is doing, while new entities and groups working in the urban space (…) operate more under the logic of doing than the logic of being informed' (SO4).

As discussed below, although these ways of understanding social action at the community level intersect with neighbourhood associations and with the participatory institutional paths, they also renovate (with different strategies, ranging from dialogue to conflict) the relationship between movements and institutions.

4. Social movements and collective action in Barcelona

To what extent have traditional patterns of citizen engagement and collaboration shifted over these last years? How have they changed? And how far can their evolution be explained by the crisis or by the change of government?

To answer these questions, we provide a general picture of the evolution of grass-roots participation and of formal structures of citizen engagement in the city. Following that, we focus our attention on two sub-case studies selected on the basis of their saliency in the context of the crisis: the management of the problem of housing evictions and the challenge of the community use of misused urban spaces. Such topics are taken as paradigmatic examples of the new patterns of citizen participation in the city and of shifts in the interaction between local government and social actors.

Trends in grassroots participation

All the respondents of our study agreed that the crisis had stimulated the emergence of new urban activisms and mobilisations that challenged the existing institutional channels for participation:

> 'The neighbourhood movement has been reinvigorated, thanks to the links that it has established with the 15M movement and the associated generational change. More broadly, neighbourhoods have been resuscitated as a fundamental scenario for social and political struggles. We can find lots of examples of new socio-political articulations at the neighbourhood level, such as Nou Barris Cabrejada (Nou Barris

Outraged), Assamblea de Solidaritat del Poblenou (Poblenou's Solidarity Assembly) and Ciutat Vella Revela't! (Ciutat Vella, Rise Up!)' (SO2).

Others commented that "Beyond the neighbourhood associations, new groups are emerging, groups that are the sons of the 15M, mostly made up of young architects involved in a kind of 'professional activism" (SO4). "In recent years, there has been an explosion of new social movements like 15M and La PAH" (SO1).

All these movements are reflective of the 'new urban activisms' (Walliser, 2013) that have emerged all across Spain in recent years. They revolve around a new urban agenda that includes topics such as social economy, the community management of misused spaces, and citizen cooperation to access basic goods such as housing and food. Such new activisms maintain strong links with different types of civil society organisations, and show preference for organisational strategies like assemblies, decentralisation, networking and the intensive use of information and communication technology. Such movements have been also at the roots of Guanyem Barcelona, providing the social basis of the new the new political party that currently governs the city of Barcelona.

Trends in formal structures of citizen participation

When CiU arrived in office in 2011 it soon expressed its will to make some significant changes in the formal structures of citizen participation. According to SO1: "the existing participatory bodies add some value to responses to the crisis. The work that has been done is important, as it has resulted in a very collaborative city. The city has a participative substrate that helps to address social problems in a more efficacious way". The same actor provided the example of the 'Citizen Agreement for an Inclusive Barcelona', "which allows you to have all the third sector organisations in a single forum and to articulate solutions in a joint manner". However, he also emphasised the "need for important changes" in the architecture of citizen engagement. As a result of such diagnosis, the CiU government launched a proposal for the modification of the Rules of Citizen Participation of 2003, organising a participative process to discuss such modification publicly. The government stressed the need for different lines of reform:

- Rationalisation of the existing participative structures, which were considered to be too numerous, with unnecessary overlaps. SO2 commented that the CiU government was attempting to carry out "authentic participative cuts in the name of rationalisation" but also acknowledged that "they don't have political capacity to dismantle the existing participative structures. However, they tend to marginalise them as arenas for political deliberation, by means of different strategies like not convening the meetings on a regular basis".

- A greater emphasis on individual participation. For example, SO4 stated that: 'urban policies in the city have historically conceded a fundamental role to neighbourhood associations. This is perverse, because they don't have enough social representativeness. However, they are given a veto power. Many of these organisations maintain strong links with political parties. In a way, they are political clienteles of the former governing parties'.

- Technological innovation, through the intensive use of ICTs in participatory processes. In the words of SO1: 'Face to face participation is in crisis. We must be aware of the epochal change in which we are immersed, and we have to make the necessary changes to adapt to this new scenario (…). Digital revolution has accelerated the transformation of relations between the citizens and public administration'.

- A reinvigorated emphasis on collaborative governance: according to SO1, "we must move from governing for the people to governing with the people". He considered that the "former government (the coalition government led by the Socialist Party) was more prone to direct public intervention; the new one is more favourable to collaboration" and emphasised that "the government does not have to intervene when there are already civil society organisations; in such cases, the government has to support them. If there is no civil society, then the government must act. The crisis accentuates the need for such a change of mentality".

Some relevant social actors like the Federation of Neighbourhood Associations of Barcelona took issue with this proposal. Three main criticisms were made to the modification of the Rules of Citizen Participation (La Veu del Carrer, 2014): first, social movements criticised that there had not been enough time for the debate; second, they considered that the opportunity for a comprehensive transformation of institutional participation had been lost; third, they criticized the new limits on participation proposed by the government, such as the thresholds imposed on citizens' initiatives (the local equivalent to popular legislative initiatives). The proposal for the modification of the Rules of Citizen Participation was finally discarded by the government because of the lack of social and political support.

This notwithstanding, the CiU government initiated new participatory processes in fields like urban planning (16 Portes de Collserola, Compromís per les Glòries, the remodelling of the Pere IV Avenue) and the community use of vacant spaces (see below). The emergence of new discourses, wrapped by conceptual categories like 'open government' and 'collaborative governance', did not have tangible impacts on the formal architecture of citizen engagement, which fundamentally remained intact. Institutional inertia and the reaction to social demands was the dominant trend of formal mechanisms of citizen participation during the government of CiU. Changes in the formal structure of participation were minimal, although the government created some new structures that overlapped with the existing ones (institutional layering), and the participatory structures that existed did not disappear but were increasingly marginalized (institutional neglect). This situation of 'institutional sluggishness' contrasts dramatically with the dynamism of grassroots participation that we described before.

Summarizing, we observe that, generally speaking, participatory rules (formal rules and mechanisms) did not change significantly during this period; narratives included some elements of innovation but without much impact in the formal participatory mechanisms; while (grassroots) practices of participation had been innovative and strengthened, especially because of the emergence of new social and political subjects.

In order to better understand the mismatches between participatory rules, practices and narratives and the challenges that they pose to the governance of the city, in the remainder of this paper we focus on the comparative analysis of conflicts around the community use of

vacant urban spaces and the problem of housing evictions. In the last section, we will include some reflections on the role of the current government in Barcelona (Barcelona en comú), ideas that will connect with the trajectory analyzed so far and with the analysis of our sub-case studies.

5.   Housing evictions and empty urban spaces in a comparative perspective

Housing evictions and abandoned urban spaces are emergent problems that reflect some of the most evident and dramatic consequences of the burst in Barcelona's housing bubble . The problem of housing evictions is related to the inability of many families to continue paying their rent or mortgages. This problem also highlights the rigidity and the injustice of a legal framework that condemns the victims of foreclosures to continue to pay their debts for the rest of their lives. Local governments do not have the power to change this legal framework, but they have become important actors both as mediators between families, social movements and financial entities and as providers of social services and social housing solutions for the affected. On the other hand, the challenge of vacant spaces is related to the inability of both private and public investors to boost new building or regeneration projects in certain spaces of the city, which opens up an opportunity for their (re)appropriation by the citizens.

Evictions: institutional dysfunction and citizen movements' reaction

The problem of housing evictions is widespread all across Barcelona – as it is in the whole country – but it has hit popular neighbourhoods at the periphery of the city in a particularly intense way. During the years of the housing bubble, many families decided to purchase a home, partly as a result of social aspiration, but also as a consequence of the fiscal incentives offered by public institutions and the ease of obtaining credit. Despite their low incomes, many of these families gained credit as a result of a combination of strategies like the sub-rental of rooms and cross-lateralization (securing multiple loans on a single piece of property); solutions often suggested by banks themselves. This situation of the "financialisation of the poor" (Palomera, 2013) – and of many middle-class families who also lost their jobs during the crisis – accentuated the vulnerability of the working classes, who were subsequently dispossessed from their homes without being freed from their debts. The neighbourhood of Ciutat Meridiana is one of the most dramatic examples of such process in the whole country (Palomera, 2013; 2014; Blanco and León, forthcoming).

During recent years, the City Council of Barcelona has addressed the problem of housing (especially foreclosures) through measures such as[2] an assistance and monitoring protocol

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[2] http://www.ara.cat/barcelona/Mes-economics-recursos-dhabitatge-desnonaments_0_1179482289.html

for cases of foreclosures – agreed with the Superior Council of the Public Prosecution; subsidies to families who have difficulties in paying their debts; an increase in the percentage of public funding for social housing, so that the rents do not exceed 30% of families' income; temporary accommodation for people affected by foreclosures; legal assistance to the victims; and mediation between families, banks and social movements. In an attempt to meet some of the demands that the PAH has been pressuring local governments with during this period, the CiU government elaborated a new housing programme for 2014-2020,that was presented two months before the May 2015 local elections[3].

Notwithstanding such efforts, SO6 acknowledged that "we make programs to address the market failures. But this is such a liberal and wild market, that it varies continuously and the measures we apply are just patches".

The housing problem has become a central issue in the new social movements' agenda - not only the PAH, but also other social organisations supporting the right to housing like the 500x20 Platform and several neighbourhood associations like the Neighbourhood Association of Ciutat Meridiana. The role of such movements has been importantly complemented by third sector organisations like Caritas, which has set up its own mediation service. Such movements and organisations play a crucial role in this conflict. On the one hand, they exert strong pressure on (local and supralocal) political institutions and financial entities: the PAH, for example, "has not only helped raise awareness on the problem of housing, but it has also driven to do a lot of activity at a political level" (SO5). "The PAH has accumulated such a large force that now have the capacity to shape many things. They have exerted major social and media pressure, and they have especially pressured financial institutions" (SO6). On the other hand, movements like the PAH, Caritas and the Neighbourhood Association of Ciutat Meridiana undertake a set of activities that partially compensate for the shortcomings of public policies. For example, such organisations provide the families affected by foreclosures with legal assistance and help them to negotiate solutions with banks:

> 'we have changed the forms of negotiation and pressure in the face of cases of evictions. At first we carried out individual negotiations, working case by case, but with increasing demands, this became unmanageable. Then we saw that it was more effective to do collective bargaining with banks organizing groups through a coordinator. This is useful both organizationally and politically, in order to raise awareness of the problem, to place the right to housing as a main theme (rather than individual ownership) and also to answer all the claims' (A2).

Movements like the PAH have also provided advice to families on how to occupy empty houses – owned by the banks – and they have promoted collective squatting of entire residential blocks.

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[3] The present local government, it's creating a set of new measures, institutional mediators and it's increasing the budget for the housing problem (investing 236 million euros to rehabilitate apartments and buildings until 2019)

The Barcelona Social Housing Forum (CHSB) is the main institutional space of public participation in the field of housing. Created in 2009, this is a consultative and participative body of the Barcelona Housing Consortium (which is formed in turn by the Barcelona City Council and the Government of Catalonia), gathering 70 entities approximately. These entities include professional associations, public and private enterprises, housing cooperatives and social housing agencies, political groups, universities, social councils and representatives of the housing departments of the Autonomous Government of Catalonia and the City Council.

The CHSB is structured in different organisational levels. The most formal space is the Plenary, which meets up once a year. The main objective of the Plenary is to hold an annual general meeting of the CHSB. On the other hand, there is a Standing Committee, formed by different entities such as neighbourhood associations, developers association, trade unions and non-profit social organizations. This standing committee is the body that coordinates the CHSB activity and meets regularly.

The Standing Committee has initiated different working groups such as the social exclusion group, the housing rehabilitation group, the working group for new construction and maintenance of housing typologies or the working group on measures to promote rental housing. These groups are also formed by private entities, non-profit entities and public entities. According to SO6, "the level of participation of these groups depends on the involvement and commitment of their members".

In contrast to this opinion, A2 considers that the quality of these participatory processes is not so much related to the commitment or intensity of participation, but to an underlying problem: the aim and methodologies of these spaces.

> 'we, as a social movement, have contact with the Committee on Evictions or with the Committee of Emergency, since sometimes we report cases of people that come to us in which we understand that quick measures have to be taken by the local government. Then, we monitor these measures. We have people specifically dedicated to that. We maintain very pragmatic relations with public institutions. We aim to bring solutions to specific problems that people have'.

It is this type of solution that is missing in participatory spaces like the CSHB.

The Committee for Evictions was created after a meeting between the PAH and Xavier Trias, the mayor of Barcelona, who also had interviews with other social housing entities. One of the main problems with this participative structure, according to A2, is that it includes too many different actors:

> 'At the beginning, we did take part in this committee, but as we started to go to some sessions we realized that all voices (financial institutions, developers, etc.) were put at the same level. Therefore, in this committee everyone's opinions are equally valid (never mind if it is the PAH's or a developer's) and then nothing is sorted out. The Committee for Evictions or the CHSB are formal spaces for listening to everyone but with little response capacity. What is needed is political will. If you want to solve the issue of evictions you don't need to design a committee, what you

really need is to solve these problems accepting the dation in payment' [something different in character from the original debt].

A3, another activist that has been engaged in this type of participatory space, adds that the methodologies used "are far from being operational". Moreover, A3 affirmed that, "these stages require a quantity of time dedication and a quantity of human resources that informal structures such as PAH cannot afford".

In line with these critical arguments, CBO1 and A1 (both in the District of Nou Barris) consider that these formal mechanisms of citizen engagement "have got neither social legitimacy nor executive capacity". However, they take advantage of such formal mechanisms as the Neighbourhood Forums (Consells de Barri) or Public Hearings (Audiències Públiques) for protesting against local authorities. Whenever any local authority like SO3 attends to such spaces "we do them an 'escrache' [an act of protest], because they are not implementing the solutions that they should. They are too far from the neighbours of Nou Barris" (A1).

This sub-case study shows the strong mismatch between emergent practices of grassroots participation - oriented to the practical solution of specific problems and the recognition of a new generation of rights with clear and specific policy implications - and the formal mechanisms of citizen consultation, which are seen as too formalistic, bureaucratic and oriented towards general debates, without capacity for providing specific solutions to specific problems.

Vacant urban spaces: an opportunity for community action?

The economic devaluation of urban space and the abandonment of public and private building projects has facilitated the proliferation of vacant and disused urban spaces. Movements claiming public space or the self-management of obsolete facilities in Barcelona are not a direct result of the crisis. Rather, such movements have a long historical trajectory and have accumulated knowledge and experience over many years. However, it is clear that the crisis and 15M represent a turning point for these movements. The 15M decentralised into a myriad of neighbourhood assemblies that promoted the community appropriation of abandoned urban lots, giving place to new practices of community management like the *Horts Indignats* (Outraged Gardens) in Poblenou and *Recreant Cruïlles* (Recreating Crossroads) in the Eixample district.

The case of Can Batlló is a paradigmatic example of both the historical trajectory of community struggle for neighbourhood facilities and the influence of the crisis and the 15M (Metropolitan Observatory of Barcelona, 2013). Can Batlló – in La Bordeta neighbourhood, in the Sants-Montjuïc district – is a large industrial park that, after having hosted more than 200 companies with 2,000 employees in the 1970s, had to close down during the industrial crisis of the beginning of the 1980s. Despite several plans of urban remodelling to convert it into a residential area, Can Batlló remained abandoned for over three decades. In June 2011, coinciding with the start of the mandate of the new government (CiU), the Platform 'Can Batlló is for the neighbourhood', promoted by the Sants Social Centre, launched the 'tic, tac, Can Battló campaign' – a threat in the form of a countdown - to press the City Council to facilitate the community use of the space. Four days before the deadline, the City

Council ceded Block 11, an area of 1,500 m2, to be used as a social and cultural space for the neighbourhood. The Can Batlló case shows how civil disobedience can force governments to respond to social demands, but it also illustrates how such disruptive actions can stimulate institutional learning and adaptation. In this latter sense, the Can Batlló case is one of the main sources of inspiration for the Pla Buits (Empty Spaces Plan) a project launched by the Participation Department of the Urban Habitat Area of the City Council. Pla Buits represents an institutional reaction to the emergence of new urban movements and social groups that reclaim a social use for abandoned urban areas. The program began with a public tender addressed to public and private non-profit entities to develop a social use proposal for one year (extendable up to three years), in one of the 20 municipally urban lots located in ten districts of the city. Finally, after the verdict of the public tender, 14 urban lots have been loaned by the local administration for citizen management. In April 2015, the second edition of this program was launched, with 11 new spaces made available for the development of temporary activities of public interest.

According to SO4, the Pla Buits is driven by the necessity to engage "new social actors" in the design and the implementation of "co-responsibility mechanisms as a way for solving social demands". The main participative goal of Urban Habitat has been "to pluralize the agents involved; to go beyond the logic of negotiation with neighbourhood associations: our main effort is to try to include new agents" in the policy process. This marks a turning point in this type of urban action, where the neighbourhood associations have historically been the privileged interlocutors of urban planning and urban projects. The 15M neighbourhood assemblies – which operate under the logics of open participative processes and open assemblies - "indicate that there are other ways to work" (SO5). In reality, many of the projects presented in the Pla Buits are led by groups of young architects and entities born in the wake of 15M who have articulated their initiatives with traditional neighbourhood associations. A clear example of this mix is the initiative 'Porta'm a l'hort' (take me to the urban garden) - a citizen managed urban garden in the Porta neighbourhood (Nou Barris). This initiative is driven by a group of young architects who used the legal structure of the Porta neighbourhood association for the public contest.

Moreover, this participatory program demands pragmatic attitudes to social movements and organisations. For SO4:

> 'In a very simplified diagnosis – since these processes are more complex – we could say that the neighbourhood associations want to develop a task of control, monitoring and accountability of what the local government is doing, whereas the new entities and groups working in the urban space operate more under the logic of doing than under the logic of being informed'.

The local public administration perceives a significant change in the ways that these new social actors relate to the public institution. According to SO4:

> 'with this program we realise that younger people may have more radical approaches than neighbourhood associations but they adopt more constructive approaches; they have clearer arguments and, a priori, there is not so much distrust with local government. They are more prone to dialogue and, although they have

some prejudice against the local government, it is not as strong as in neighbourhood associations'.

To contrast this institutional view, CBO2 considers that Pla Buits:

> 'is a political opportunity that the public administration has been able to detect. Many of these spaces embody a social and historical demand, but the local government has reacted to these demands only during the crisis. In our case we have been given 10% of the total urban lot, but it may be a Trojan horse to press the local authorities, so that those educational and cultural facilities they promised they were going to build in this space are finally constructed'.

CBO2 argues that the community space and initiative at Germanetes[4] demonstrates how these changes facilitate the task of the City Council, both to better govern the city – managing potential social conflicts – as well as to shift responsibility to the citizens. However, CBO2 also shows trust in local government: "I am convinced that those who have taken the initiative of this program completely believe in it. And they have been very brave pulling it forward".

However, some of these movements complain about the technical (and funding) requirements that this programme imposes on them. Some groups have had to order and pay for a building permit and activities license to use these urban spaces and – as CBO2 told us "Urban Habitat have not made legal arrangements to help out with these type of problems. We also have to go to many meetings and make project reports. We do this through volunteer work and it is actually very expensive. We are not the secretaries of the City Council".

This case illustrates how new discourses on co-responsibility generate new kinds of participatory mechanisms and practices, in which citizens are not only expected to give their opinion but are co-responsibilized in the provision of solutions. Such new logics of participation can be seen as an improvement with regards to traditional mechanisms of citizen participation in that they generate more horizontal relationships between the local state and the citizens, widen the notion of citizen participation and favour the community appropriation of common goods. However, such new logics also entail the risk of over-responsibilization of social groups, the privatisation of public responsibilities and the de-activation of autonomous and critical mobilisation by social and community organisations.

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[4] See https://recreantcruilles.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/prueba-3-rc-english_sqek.pdf for further details.

6.   Conclusions

The case of Barcelona is a good example of the participation boom that took place in Catalonia and Spain – and in other parts of the world – in the beginning of the new millennium. However, Barcelona's participative tradition can be traced back to the late 1980s, when some of the current mechanisms of citizen participation were set up. Citizen participation mechanisms, in fact, form part of a wider model of collaborative governance, in which local government maintains a leading role, but cooperates with different types of actors (public, private and communitarian) to reach collective goals such as urban regeneration, economic development and social and environmental progress. Collaborative governance has crystallized in the city as a tradition, spanning different mandates and resisting the effects of governmental change in 2011.

Consequently, continuity (rather than retrenchment, enhancement or innovation) is the dominant trend of collaborative (and participative) governance in the city of Barcelona in recent years. As anticipated by the theoretical framework of the TRANSGOB project, collaborative structures deployed over many years (two decades in the case of Barcelona) can become deeply institutionalised practices difficult to modify or transform, even in the current period of crisis and fiscal retrenchment. Collaboration has become a "policy paradigm", that is to say, a cognitive framework that defines legitimate courses of action for politicians and state managers (Hall, 1993; cited in Fuller, 2010: 279). Moreover, the fact that the current government has not dismantled the existing participative structures – inherited from the former centre-left governments – might be related to the fact that the anticipated costs of eliminating them 'could simply outweigh the benefits' (Davies and Blanco, 2014).

The new conservative government of Barcelona certainly launched a modification of the current 'Rules of Citizen Participation' passed in 2003. Such modification was interpreted by some actors as a lost opportunity for a comprehensive and radical transformation of participatory structures in the city, something that some would have expected to occur given the intensity of social and political transformations under the crisis. The government's discourses on citizen participation put the emphasis on (supposedly) innovative notions such as 'open government', 'social innovation', 'collaboration' and 'e-democracy', although such discourses have not had significant impacts on the structures of citizen engagement.

In contrast to this situation of institutional paralysis, the crisis has framed the emergence of new social movements in the city such as the 15M assemblies, the PAH and new social groups which reclaim the community use and self-management of misused urban areas. Such movements adopt new styles of mobilisation – more horizontal, more decentralised, more inter-connected via social networks and the internet. They are also reflective of a 'pragmatic turn' in collective action, which means that they tend to focus on specific problems (such as housing evictions and misused urban spaces) to which they try to create specific answers through direct action, complementing or compensating for state and market deficiencies. In a way, they could be considered as examples of what Davies (2014) has called the 'every-day makers', although they show an uneven capacity to challenge the status quo: movements like the PAH, for example, challenge private property and confront central actors in the capitalist system like the banks; whereas groups that reclaim the self-

management of misused urban spaces contribute to temporary solutions to the shortcomings of the market and state, despite being critical of the neoliberal city.

The case of Barcelona illustrates an increasing mismatch between formal mechanisms and rules of participative democracy, and emerging practices and discourses on citizen engagement. Such mismatch provokes an increasing delegitimisation of existing (formal) channels of citizen involvement in local governance. However, the new social movements demand a new, more transparent, more democratic local politics, with more opportunities for direct participation such as popular legislative initiatives, community management of public goods and referendums. The debate on participative democracy is far from being over. It rather adopts new terms, and expresses ambitions formulated by new socio-political actors. The new government of Barcelona en Comú inherits the participative dynamics of the city. It expresses the emergence of novel concepts such as social innovation, co-production and the urban commons that emphasize the need of developing more horizontal relationships between the local institutions and the citizens. It is also a reflection of the development of practices of grass-roots mobilisation, claiming a new way of doing politics in the city. The new government aims to give continuity to the participative and collaborative tradition of the city, although it is working on a fresh model of participative governance based on the strengthening of existing structures of citizen participation like the neighbourhood councils, the enhancement of direct democracy mechanisms like citizen initiatives and referendums, the community management of public spaces and facilities and the promotion of participation for underrepresented social groups such as the migrants, the youth and the homeless. To what extent such political intentions will be translated into tangible changes in the formal structures of participation in the city remains to be seen in the future.

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