COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE UNDER AUSTERITY IN BARCELONA: A COMPARISON BETWEEN EVICTIONS AND EMPTY URBAN SPACE MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

By the means of comparing two salient policy issues related to the crises effects in Barcelona, housing evictions and the management of vacant urban spaces - this paper analyses the evolution of collaborative governance arrangements amidst scarcity. We conclude that collaborative governance in Barcelona is moving between continuation and reformulation. Although a new institutional discourse is emerging stressing new forms of co-responsibility and co-management, the main shifts in the way of tackling the crisis effects in Barcelona comes from social movements and community organizations. Finally, we note that collaborative governance evolution in Barcelona is not only context and path-dependent but also issue-dependent.

Keywords: urban governance, crisis, participation, evictions, empty urban spaces, grassroots movements.
1. Introduction

The current crisis has produced important urban effects in south European cities. Drawing upon the comparison between two of these crisis effects in Barcelona (housing evictions and urban empty spaces) in this paper we analyse social and institutional responses in order to show the evolution of collaborative governance arrangements under austerity.

While social movements continue to appeal networked forms of collective action (Mason, 2012; Merrifield, 2011), in public administration the former enthusiasm for network governance seems to have diminished (Davies and Blanco, 2014). Collaborative governance, though, understood as ‘governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-governmental actors in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets’ (Ansell and Gash, 2008: 544), may also represent a good way to tackle crisis effects in a context where the State is losing effectiveness. Thus, in cities where collaborative governance has an important path, should these arrangements follow a strategy of enhancement, retrenchment or innovation?

Barcelona has a long history of community organisations and social movements and, at the same time, during the last 30 years has developed a complex network of participatory governance arrangements. Despite this background could facilitate collaborative responses to the crisis consequences, fiscal retrenchment poses major governance challenges. Moreover, after 32 years of left-wing government, the City Council shifted to a conservative government in 2011. Our interest, thus, is to analyse how collaborative governance arrangements have evolved in this changing context. As we will see, our case study shows that collaborative governance evolution is not only context and path-dependent but also issue-dependent.

First of all we introduce the city background in order to better understand the context and the trajectory in which these policy issues are being tackled. After that, we focus on the evolution of grassroots movements in Barcelona after the crisis outbreak in these policy fields, analysing both policy fields. Then we look at the local government’s policy responses and the specific collaborative arrangements that it has adopted. Finally, we conclude by summarizing the comparison between both policy issues.

2. City background

Barcelona, the main city of Catalonia (Spain), is a Mediterranean compact city of 1.6 millions inhabitants (91 km²), inside a great Metropolitan Region of 5 million inhabitants (163 municipalities and 633 km²). The city is divided into 10 decentralized districts and 72 neighbourhoods, with significant urban and socio-economic differences among them.

Barcelona has undergone profound transformations since the arrival of democracy by the end of the 1970s. After the industrial crisis in the first half of the 80s, Barcelona experienced a strong process of urban transformation, with an intense rehabilitation of its urban fabric and a deep tertiarization of its economy. A clear public strategy was developed, involving the private sector, to shift the city through the cultural industry and the knowledge economy (Casellas, 2006). In few years Barcelona became one of the most attractive cities for tourism and capital flows and the most admired city by other mayors and local leaderships in what concerns its urban development (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2011). 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 closely related to the urban policies carried out during this period.

These policies have given shape to what is known as the “Barcelona Model”, a model characterized by two main factors. First, using mega-events (Olympic Games in 1992 and Universal Forum of Cultures in 2004) as catalysts for great urban transformations (such as the recuperation of the seafront, the rehabilitation of the old district, the development of New Downtown Areas and the construction of the ring roads). Second, developing public-private partnerships and public participation arrangements as strategies of legitimization and involvement of civil society in urban public policies. According to Blanco (2009), though, the model has evolved significantly over time, and has been materialized differently depending on policy areas (urban planning, social policy, environment, etc.) and urban areas (new areas of centrality, urban neighbourhoods, peripheries etc.).

Since the first democratic elections in 1979 to the last municipal elections in 2011 the City Council of Barcelona was governed by a coalition of progressive parties. The PSC, a socio-liberal (labour) party, was the hegemonic political force during this period. The PSC governed the city together with ICV-EUiA, a political organisation that comes from the communist tradition and is now self defined as an eco-socialist coalition. The ICV-EUiA coalition has taken on important positions in the city government such as the departments of social welfare and environment. Barcelona’s urban policies during this period, thus, are the result of the socio-liberal values of the PSC on one hand (McNeill, 1999), and the permanent need of balances (asymmetrical) with the minority eco-socialist party.

In 2011, a conservative coalition, CiU, won the municipal elections. Since then on, this coalition runs the municipal government, despite not having an absolute majority. The CiU government is supported by PP, the right-wing party that is currently running the Spanish government. Therefore, changes on governance arrangements and power relationships that will be analysed in this paper are not only a consequence of the current crisis but also the result of a political shift at the City Council.

2.1. The impacts of the economic crisis on the city

The impacts of the economic crisis in Barcelona are significant in terms of unemployment, poverty and socio-spatial inequalities. Due to a very international and diversified economic structure, these impacts are less notable than in the whole country. Nevertheless, despite these facts have helped to attenuate the crisis effects on the city, nowadays they are starting to show some signs of depletion (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2013). Therefore, the city is becoming more and more vulnerable.

Unemployment in Barcelona has grown from 8.4% in 2008 to 19% in 2012. However, the unemployment rate is higher in the whole of Catalonia (24.1%) and even higher in the whole of Spain (26.2%). The at-risk-of-poverty rate was 16% in 2012 (19.9% in Catalonia) and inequalities have increased deeply between 2007 and 2010 (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2012). Immigrants and young people are two especially vulnerable groups. Young people represent 40.3% of the population and more than the half of them are unemployed. Foreign population represents 17.3% of the whole population, but 21.1% of the unemployed people are immigrants. As we have previously said, social differences have a specific geographical translation in the
city and, for instance, while some neighbourhoods have 41.6% of immigrants, others have 12.4%.

The crisis in Spain has also affected public budgets of national, regional and local governments. However, the debt of the 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 public debt of 2.193.7€ per capita in 2013.

The current crisis, though, is also the result of the depletion of an urban model that, specially in some parts of the city, prioritized the attraction of flows of capital rather than urban policies promoting and facilitating residential functions, social relationships and citizen welfare (Delgado 2005). In this context new urban problems, like housing evictions and vacant urban spaces, have emerged in Barcelona as a consequence of the crisis effects.

The real estate bubble, a low interest rate and a tenure regime based on property explain why the crisis has generated such severe effects over the right of housing in Barcelona, specially in the peripheral neighbourhoods. Spain has the lowest rent public housing stock in Europe. Thus, the access to a basic need such as housing has been basically provided through the financial market. Many people moved during the bubble from Barcelona to the second periphery of the Metropolitan Region (Parés et al., 2013). The more disadvantaged areas of the city were occupied by low-income families, most of them immigrants, that bought their dwellings through easily affordable bank mortgages. When the financial crisis broke the value of property assets fell down, unemployment grew up and many families could not afford to pay their mortgage. Furthermore, the Spanish Mortgage Law, which has been declared abusive by the European Court of Justice, deeply penalizes mortgaged people: they continue heavily indebted even if they return their homes to the banks. Catalonia is the region of Spain most affected by this situation and, as a consequence, almost 19.000 evictions were carried out during 2013. Nevertheless, it is also important to highlight that most of the evictions that are currently taking place in Barcelona are related to rent non-payment.

As we have previously noted, Barcelona has been the epicentre of a model of urban planning focused on macro-projects and mega-events. The built environment has been transformed during the last three decades at the rhythm of these projects and according to the real estate bubble. However, when the bubble burst most of the capital left and the city stopped its permanent reconfiguration. Simultaneously, cuts in the public sector have also slowed public investment. Consequently, empty urban spaces, or spaces without use, have multiplied. At the same time, and contesting to this situation, several social organizations and grassroots movements have developed urban actions in order to trigger empty urban spaces outside the market and also outside (or beyond) the State (Bellet, 2014).

2.2. A long history of community organizations and social movements

Barcelona has a long history of community organizations and social movements. Analysing its evolution we can stress the significance of three types of social organizations:

- Neighbourhood associations: they came out and became very strong in the context of the late Francoism (60s and 70s). They have continued to play a very important role in the context of democracy, despite some of the interviewed consider that they have lost capacity of social mobilization and representation.
• Third Social Sector: there is a dense network of social care organizations in Barcelona, which develop their activity on the basis of volunteerism and with public aid. They are also involved in a number of consultative forums, like the Social Welfare Municipal Forum – an advisory forum for the social policies in the city.

• Urban social movements: they have strong links with the no-global movement and the neighbourhood associations, specially the Federation of Neighbourhood Associations of Barcelona (FAVB). Such movements are very critical of the “Barcelona Model” of urban development, which they consider as a reflection of global neoliberalism. They denounce that it has provoked the touristification of the city, gentrification in areas like the seafront and the city centre, abandonment of peripheral areas and the increase of social inequalities.

2.3. A complex network of citizen participation arrangements

During the last 30 years the Barcelona City Council has developed a dense and complex network of institutionally-led formal arrangements of citizen participation. Most of these arrangements are regulated by the Citizen Engagement Rules, passed by the City Council in 2003. Some of them fall beyond such regulatory framework. The main types of citizen participation structures in Barcelona are the following:

• A dense network of consultative bodies made of the representatives of the City Council and of the main social organizations which meet up on a regular basis: one City Forum and a myriad of thematic forums at city, district and neighbourhood levels.

• A myriad of ad-hoc participatory processes linked to different type of local policies (strategic planning, urban and neighbourhood regeneration projects, social programs, etc.) and using different kinds of participatory methods.

• Different types of participatory mechanisms such as citizen workshops, citizen juries, public hearings and referendums.

• Different kinds of “agreements” or partnership structures between the City Council and social organizations in fields like social inclusion, sustainability, employment and mobility/transport.

3. Grassroots movements after the crisis outbreak

In the Spanish State, the burst of the housing bubble and the current party system disrepute have coincided. The 15M movement (also known as the “Indignados Movement” was without any doubt an event that took shape within this context. As it is well known, from 15th May 2011 a lot of public squares of cities across Spain were occupied by this citizen movement. Thousands of people took the streets and over the following days camped in the plazas, mobilized through social networks calling for “Democracia Real YA!” (Real democracy NOW!). With slogans and shouts that are already part of the social imaginary like “they do not represent us” or “we are not merchandise in the hands of bankers and politicians” the 15M movement placed the political institutions at the centre of their critique. Criticism towards political and financial class and a very critical view regarding the two-party system (formed by the parties PSOE and PP) who is accused of being primarily responsible of the crisis. On the other hand, one of the main demands of 15M was the need for a more participatory democracy, a system in which citizens can take part in public decision-making more regularly.
After the first outbreak in 2011, the 15M has tended to decentralize, from neighbourhood assemblies to more complex social processes where 15M values have been influencing new spaces of social action or spaces that were already established. As outlined below, this expanding process has been very influential in the practices of urban participation in Barcelona, both in the forms of organization of new social actors and the emergence of a new political culture on ways to deal with the institutions.

More specifically, we are going to analyse some citizen movements that have emerged around two areas closely related to the effects of the crisis in Barcelona: first, the problems of housing and especially evictions; second, the necessity of giving new social and community uses to empty urban spaces. This will provide us some basic ideas about non-institutional practices of citizen engagement, formal mechanisms of public participation and the relations between institutions and the citizens.

3.1. Evictions: the institutional dysfunction and citizen movements’ reaction.

Urban Habitat is the area of the City of Barcelona dedicated to urban planning, infrastructure, housing and the environment. Within this area, we find the Deputy Management of Housing of Barcelona, a public department that directs and coordinates the activities of regeneration of the urban land (remodelling and development) and construction and access to housing. It also oversees the maintenance and rehabilitation of housing in the city. To better understand the tasks of this public entity and how they are tackling the problem of evictions, we interviewed Toni Sorolla. Sorolla is the Deputy Manager of Housing of the City Council of Barcelona and Chief Executive Officer of the Municipal Housing Board.

In his view, the central pitfall related to local public administration is the impossibility of an effective institutional response to the problem of housing because of two main reasons: the challenge of long term policies and the difficulty of placing housing ahead of the economic priority. In his own words: «Housing policies require a long planning period. This conflicts with the need for immediate answers to pressing problems, but also with political terms. For politicians, having to respond to 4 years away does not help. It will take many years for this to be solved and it will be years where the political culture has to put housing policies in the first place, as an important priority, not just reacting to media trends or claims and urgent social needs.»

One case mentioned by Sorolla where this institutional incapacity to respond to the structural problem is perceived is in part of the contents of the 2008-2016 Housing Plan, a document consisting on a set of measures that seek to react to the problem of housing in Barcelona. In this Housing Plan, there is a line of work devoted to the problem of real estate mobbing - i.e. real estate investors harassment on tenants. To address this problem, an agreement with the Superior Council of the Public Prosecution was conducted and a monitoring protocol for cases was designed. But now in Barcelona, one the most important problems is the housing payment and the evictions for not paying the housing rental and, as Sorolla remarks «we have to implement support for rental payments or emergency housing, which is managed by a Table of Emergency, where these cases are typified. We make programs to address the market failures. But this is such a liberal and wild market, that it varies continually and the measures we take are just patches.»
In this problematic context of public dysfunction, is where The Platform of Citizens Affected by Mortgages (PAH) is continuously acting to respond daily to a growing social demand and trying to carry out measures, which may amend these structural problems. The PAH movement was born in 2009 and comes from earlier platforms that defended the social right to housing like V de Vivienda. But the 15M political process has allowed the PAH to escalate, expand and redesign their practices. In this sense, 15M has meant a step forward for the housing right support movements. The most important demands that have led this citizen platform are an immediate stop to all evictions and sole property and the transformation of empty houses held by financial institutions into social housing. With the several campaigns for Stop Evictions the platform has stopped more than 1000 evictions during its 5 life years.

Ernesto Marco, one of the members and spokesman of the PAH in Barcelona, explained us both the forms of organization that the PAH is using and the main problems encountered in their practice of support to the right to housing. In Catalonia there are more than 60 local assemblies of the PAH which meet weekly. Furthermore, a Catalan assembly takes place every 4 weeks, where more than 200 activists representing the Catalan local assemblies meet and discuss campaigns, design lines of action and share information. At the regional level, there is autonomy to perform specific campaigns, depending on the singularities of the problem of housing and evictions in each place. There is great flexibility in the organizational form of the PAH, adapting it to the concrete needs and what is considered a priority in every moment.

Ernesto Marco told us something that illustrates the ability of the PAH to change its strategies, so as to make them more effective at every new situation: «a good example is how 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 of each) and also to answer all the claims.»

Evidently, in the forms of organization of PAH there is an essential element related to communication and the continuous dissemination of its activities. The intensive use of communication networks (through social networks like Facebook or Twitter) and the continuous presence in the media (from most mainstream media debates on prime time television but also alternative media) is a very well-structured architecture, designed by the platform's communication groups.

The PAH have also designed State-wide campaigns that can have a greater impact and seek to interpellate big media at a deeper level. One of the most important campaigns until the date has been the Popular Legislative Initiative (ILP) to demand to the Spanish Congress the regulation of the dation in payment retroactively (in which the house is returned to cancel any outstanding debt), stop residential evictions and adequate provision of social housing and affordable rents. This ILP was submitted to the Congress by the PAH. February the 12th, 2013, the Congress unanimously gave leave for the ILP to proceed. However, most parties submitted amendments, the Popular Party unified the ILP process with the Government's proposal for a reform of the Mortgages Act. Finally, the demands of this ILP endorsed by nearly a million and a half citizens didn’t get a favourable institutional response. As Ernesto Marco concludes «this and many other requests make the glass ceiling clear, where we find a continuously institutional deadlock. Even proposals that have been brought to the Catalan Parliament by political parties such as ICV-EUIA that were in part based on the requests we made on ILP, have been rejected by the
One of the typical ways of acting of the PAH is to exhaust all legal measures before carrying out direct or more belligerent actions. The last campaign of the PAH appeals to this glass ceiling (a concept that the PAH usually use) that they continuously find at a State level and try to launch the same demands at a European level doing escraches during the last European Parliament elections. As reported on its website last May, the PAH presented a new campaign to reclaim solutions to the dramatic housing crisis. The PAH will hold peaceful demonstrations (“escraches”) in electoral events during the European Parliament elections campaign. Along with blocking and occupation of bank offices’ actions and the occupation of block of flats through the PAH’s Obra Social with which over 1.000 people have been rehoused, the escraches campaign is another example of the need of the PAH to implement more direct action and political pressure to find a solution.

3.2. Empty urban spaces: a new urban model prefigured in traditional social struggles

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the inability to produce competitive advantage over the territory through the property mechanisms has favoured the practices of community re-appropriation of public space in Barcelona. The economical devaluation of urban space and the abandonment of public and private building projects, have facilitated the proliferation of a number of vacant urban spaces with a potential ‘social value’. However, this does not mean that the movements claiming public space or the self-management of obsolete equipment in Barcelona are a direct result of the crisis. These practices have their own historical trajectory and have accumulated knowledge regarding the use of other indicators to measure the value of an area or to manage it effectively.

As in other cities that have focused their economic and governance model in extracting added value from the urban space, in Barcelona different practices have appeared to reclaim public space and to promote the community management of urban resources. It is clear that the crisis and 15M represent a turning point for these movements. The case of Can Batlló is a practical 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 was one of the collectivized factories during the Spanish civil war. It is in the La Bordeta neighbourhood, in the Sants-Montjuïc Municipal District of Barcelona. In 1943, Can Batlló became the property of Julio Muñoz Ramonet, one of the most influential men of the Francoist Barcelona. The business as a textile factory closed in the 60s, taking all machinery and renting warehouses to different companies and becoming a “city of trades” with more than 200 companies and 2,000 employees in the 70s. Despite campaigns to recover Can Batlló have been happening since the 70s, demanding the expropriation of the enclosure, the position of the Social Center Sants –one of the most important neighbourhood organisations – on this topic was always ambiguous as a consequence of the complex confluence of interests: First, the industrial workers who had their occupancy in Can Batlló and promoted consumption in the retail sector of the neighbourhood. Secondly, homeowners who had their homes affected by the General Metropolitan Plan of Barcelona and should be relocated. Finally, the need for facilities and green areas for residents, who saw the neighbourhood was saturated with buildings, ring roads and major avenues.
After the neighbourhood movements of the 70s, the implementation of some demands on municipal projects and the macro-events that seek to project Barcelona at international level, the local public administration tried to finally implement several urban transformation plans that attempt to revalue urban spaces in the area where Can Batlló is located. These new urban plans led to the owners of Can Batlló to glimpse the possibility of obtaining large profits by transforming the factory into an area of housing. But after a long period in which various plans were designed and all kind of frustrated negotiations between public and private entities took place, the burst of the housing bubble begun. The discomfort generated by this long period of time without any work sparked the beginning of a strong lobbying campaign on behalf of residents who demanded the initiation of Can Batlló’s remodelling. At a meeting of the monitoring committee in early March 2009, the neighbours, tired of continuous delays in implementing the plan, put a deadline for the start of works on June 1, 2011, coinciding with the start of the mandate of the new council (CiU) after the local elections. It was called the ‘tic, tac Can Batlló’ campaign, a threat in the form of a countdown. It is at that moment when neighbors and the Sants Social Center created The Platform “Can Batlló is for the neighbourhood”, an heterogeneous network of social actors formed by collectives of architects, city movements, neighbourhood associations, activists, etc. Four days before the deadline of ‘tic, tac Can Batlló’, the City Council gave one of the ships (the so-called Block 11), 1,500 m2 to be used as a social and cultural space for the neighbourhood.

Can Batlló is a paradigmatic process related with an alternative model of city, a model where the citizen management of disused urban spaces is an important key to build a city beyond the Barcelona brand. Can Batlló process combines institutional negotiation with elements of civil disobedience in seeking to respond to social demands that neither the market nor the state have managed to respond. Currently, Can Batlló is an essential reference for the public actions that the local government has assumed, and for other social activists who are self-managing urban spaces or urban lots.

This is not a linear process where an old way of managing urban land is overcome by a new model. In fact, what we can state is that the economic crisis and the exhaustion of an urban model based on monopolistic rent leads to citizen-based participatory practices that claim the re-appropriation of public space. But there is not a totally new process, but a renovated one.

3.3. Non-institutional practices of citizen engagement: the pragmatic turn and social-based solutions

After analysing some of the causes of the institutional dysfunction and the citizen movements reaction in the support to the right to housing and in the self-management of urban resources, we can stress some aspects about this processes emerging in Barcelona:

- First, the housing problem has become a central issue in the new social movements’ agenda - not only the PAH, but also another citizen platforms in defence of the right to housing like like 500x20. This issue has also had a significant impact on the agendas of neighbourhood associations like Ciutat Meridiana or the Federation of Neighbourhood Associations of Barcelona. One important thing to note is that there has been an increment of the practices of individual and collective squatting of buildings and houses (owned by banks) supported or led by these platforms. This is related to one of the most important operating premises of platforms such as the PAH: when all the legal measures are exhausted, they finally choose direct action.
Second, cases like the PAH, Can Batlló or other social practices for defending the social use of urban space have in common trying to find solutions to specific problems. This is both a way to accomplish concrete objectives and also a way to promote citizens' political empowerment (through the citizen management of an urban lot or another urban resource or through the collective promotion of a Popular Legislative Initiative or stopping an eviction). This is closely related with the importance in the non-institutional practices of citizen engagement to demonstrate that things can be changed, like shows one of the most popular slogans of la PAH: *si se puede* (yes, it can be done). This way of acting is what we call the pragmatic turn, that it is based on incrementally moving from the logic of demanding to the logic of doing.

Third, we must understand these new social processes born or reinforced by 15M not like something that totally breaks with the traditional forms of social action. On the contrary, these social movements extract knowledge and resources from the historical course of the previous mobilisations, as we have seen in the case of Can Batlló or in the case of the PAH. In fact, the headquarter of the PAH was located for years in the offices of the Federation of Neighbourhood Associations of Barcelona. In most cases, the relationships between traditional social actors and new social actors in Barcelona are quite intense. Later, we will see that this relationship between new social and neighbourhood associations also occurs in some self-management practices of urban lots.

4. Policies and institutional practices of citizen engagement

After analysing the evolution of grassroots movements around both policy issues of our research, in this section we will outline the role of the local government and the way how collaborative governance arrangements have been used in this new scenario.

4.1. The Barcelona Social Housing Council and its limits

In the area of housing, neighbourhood organizations - particularly the Federation of Neighbourhood Associations of Barcelona - have been the social actors who have traditionally had greater influence on the City Council decisions. With the emergence and the strengthening of movements such as the PAH, traditional social actors haven’t lost their role, but have rather actively supported these new movements and have shared and extended their political space of influence.

Eva Jou, consultant of the Deputy Housing Management of Barcelona, explained to us in an interview the impact of these new social movements in city policies. The actions and demands of the PAH have not only helped raise awareness of the social housing problem, but –as Eva Jou states – «have driven to do a lot of activity at a political level.» Toni Sorolla also remarked this question: «The PAH has accumulated such a large force that now have the capacity to condition many things. They have made a big social and media pressure, and they have especially pressured financial institutions.» Apart from the enactment of specific programs of housing assistance, the local government has also adopted new institutional spaces for citizen participation to tackle the housing crisis in the city - spaces in which the PAH has participated with misgivings.
The Barcelona Social Housing Council (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 Autonomous Government of Catalonia), gathering 70 entities approximately. These entities range from 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 has different mechanisms to carry out its activities. The most formal mechanism is the Plenary, which meets up once a year. The main objective of the Plenary is to make an annual balance and assessment of the CHSB. Its purpose is to provide information about the work of the CSHB. On the other hand, there is a Standing Committee, formed by different entities such as neighbourhood associations, developers association, trade unions and nonprofit social organizations. This standing committee is the body that coordinates the management and direction of 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 of measures to promote the rental housing. These groups are also formed by private entities, non-profit entities and public entities. According to Toni Sorolla, «The level of participation of these groups depends on the activity that their members are performing, so it depends on their own involvement and commitment.» The working group on social exclusion, for example, was the one that drafted almost entirely the chapter devoted to these problems in the Housing Plan of 2008. Nowadays, this group is configured as a monitoring group and when the Deputy Housing Management intends to make any changes or new regulations related to social exclusion and housing, a meeting with the working group on social exclusion is called.

When assessing the participatory quality of CHSB, Toni Sorolla notes that the Standing Committee meetings are always arranged by the Deputy Housing Management: «this is simply because we are the ones who are doing it, not because it cannot be otherwise. In institutionalized spaces of participation it often happens that those who launched the initiative (a public institution) are the ones who mark the group's activity.»

On the other hand, Ernesto Marco from la PAH notes that the quality of these participatory processes is not so much related with the commitment or intensity of participation, but with an underlying problem: the aim and methodologies of these spaces. As Ernesto Marco explained «we, as a social movement, have contact with the Table of Evictions or with the Table 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 solutions what they do not find in participatory spaces like the CSHB.

The Table of Evictions was created after a meeting between the PAH and Xavier Trias, the current mayor of Barcelona, that also had interviews with other social housing entities. As Ernest Marco remarks: «at the beginning, we did take part in this Table but as we started to go to some sessions we realized that all voices (financial institutions, developers, etc.) were very much the same. Therefore, in this Table 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 Table of Evictions or the CHSB
is a formal space 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 Table, what you really need is to solve these problems accepting the *datio in solutum.*” Mercé Pidemont, another activist of the PAH in Barcelona that has been engaged in this type of participatory spaces, confirms in an interview the same perception. She adds that coupled with the lack of legitimacy and effectiveness of these institutional participatory spaces, the formal methodologies used are far from being operative. Moreover, these spaces 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 responded Filiberto Bravo, the President of the Ciutat Meridiana Neighbourhood, and Salva Torres, the President of the Porta Neighbourhood (both neighbourhoods of the District of Nou Barris in Barcelona). They said that these formal mechanisms of citizen engagement haven’t got «neither social legitimacy nor executive capacity.» In fact, in both cases they used other participatory spaces at neighbourhood level like the *Neighbourhood Committees* for protesting and for direct action. Whenever any public entity or political representatives like Irma Rognoni, the District Councillor of Nou Barris, attends to such spaces «we do them an *escrache,* because they are not implementing the solutions that they should. They are too far from the Nou Barris neighbours» concludes Salva Torres.

4.2. ‘Pla Buits’, an institutional program for empty urban spaces

In the area of empty urban spaces, one of the undoubtedly most prominent institutional projects to foster citizen participation in Barcelona is the *Pla Buits.*

The Pla Buits is an institutional reaction to the emergence of these new urban movements and social collectives that reclaim a new use for economically devalued spaces. Pla Buits began with a public contest addressed to public and private non-profit entities to develop a social use proposal or a cultural activity with a one-year time management (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 contest, 12 urban lots have been loaned by the local administration for citizen management.

This program has been launched by the Participation Department of the Urban Habitat area of the City Council of Barcelona. Under the discourse of «the management of the meantime» this program tries to respond to the need of «overcoming an age of uncertainty» with respect to the model of the city. It is also conceived of as a way to manage public space and «obsolete infrastructures». With these words Laia Torras, primary responsible for the Participation Department of Urban Habitat, explained the project to us. During an interview with Laia Torras, she analysed the different reasons why her department has adopted this plan and made some reflexions on its implementation.

First, the program 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 add new agents» in the policy process, concludes Laia Torras. This marks a change in this type of urban actions, where the neighbourhood associations have historically been the privileged interlocutors of urban planning and urban projects. Torras explained to us that conceding «all
the social representation to neighbourhood associations could be a *perversion*. The 15M neighbourhood assemblies, which operate under the logics of open participative processes and open assemblies, «indicates that there are other ways to work». At this point it should be stressed that many of the projects presented in the Pla Buïts are led by groups of young architects and entities born in the wake of 15M and who have articulated their initiatives with traditional neighbourhood associations. The characteristic of this program is the mix of social and community organisations, a mix consisting of traditional entities and new social actors. A clear example of this mix is the initiative *Porta’m a l’hort* (take me to the urban garden) - a citizen managed urban lot in the Porta neighbourhood (Nou Barris District) developed in the frame of Pla Buïts. This initiative is driven by a group of young architects who used the legal structure of the Porta neighbourhood association for the public contest.

Second, this program calls for a series of more pragmatic attitudes, which resonate with what we saw in previous sections. As Laia Torras explained «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 - for example, this group of young architects who participated in the Pla Buïts - operate more under the *logic of doing* than under the *logic of being informed*» We can see here a way of trying to dialogue with this pragmatic turn, with these practices that seem to focus on specific objectives.

Third, from the local public administration it is perceived a change in the ways that these new social actors relate with the public institution. On this issue, Laia Torras argued that «with this program we notice that younger people may have more radical approaches than neighbourhood associations but in more constructive ways; they have clearer arguments and, a priori, there is not so much distrust with local government. They have more propensity for dialogue and, although they have some prejudice to the local government, it is not as strong as in neighbourhood associations.» It is interesting to note that these reflexions that express a change of attitude towards the institutions from new social actors have been repeated in other interviews. Àngel Miret Serra, from the Manager's Office for the Quality of Life, Equality and Sports of the City Council or Toni Sorolla and Eva Jou from the Deputy Management of Housing, also highlighted this change in attitudes in the groups of young architects, or even in some PAH activists.

But facing this *change in attitude* with some institutions, it is also necessary to note that this increase in trust towards the institutions is not a synonymous of a naive or inexperienced position. To contrast this institutional view, we made an interview to Roger Pujol, member of the collective *Recreant Cruïlles* who, with other social entities, are managing an urban lot called *Germanetes*, located in the Eixample Esquerra neighbourhood.

Roger Pujol explained that «from our point of view (Pla Buïts) is a political opportunity that the public administration has been able to detect. Many of these spaces are a social historical claim, 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 push, 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». Pujol argued that *Germanetes* know to what extent these measures 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. But, in the other hand, there is also a trust that has been built, which is not a starting point, but it rather has to do with an on-going dialogue. As Pujol expressed: «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.»

We can also find that there have been many technical requirements that have made this management of the meantime become more complex. Some groups that participated in Pla Buits have had to order and pay for a building permit and activities licenses to use these urban spaces and –as Pujol 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 volunteer work and it is actually very expensive. We are not the secretaries of the City Council». Therefore, maybe there is a new relationship with the institutions that may be less suspicious but not less critical. Using formal mechanisms of citizen engagement does not mean deleting the main objectives that led them to participate or not to raise the possibility of using other mechanisms that put a strain on the relation with the institution.

The discourse of some social groups of Barcelona that are managing these kind of urban spaces expressed the need to have a vision of the city as a whole, not only about the managing of some specific resources. This is the case of Germanetes, but also Can Batlló and other spaces that are not in the Pla Buits. That means, not only to maintain a dialogue-pressure relationship with the local government for problems related to the concrete resource management, but also by the actions that can be undertaken in other areas such as public health or public education. As Pujol concludes «We will not undertake illegal actions that the public administration or neighbours do not like. But we won’t think twice if we see that we need to tighten the relationship with the institution in order to force them to do what they must do. We are ready to undertake creative actions to denounce a conflict or an institutional neglect».

4.3. Towards a new collaborative governance in Barcelona?

From the above, we can highlight some aspects about the evolution of collaborative governance in Barcelona:

- In general, we see that collaborative governance in Barcelona is moving between continuation and reformulation. More specifically, “old” mechanisms of citizen participation are being complemented by new participative processes initiated by the new government. Traditional participative structures, however, are called into question by the new social movements and some neighbourhood associations. The process of transformation of such participative structures is slow and it mainly depends on the trust relations between social and institutional actors who want to promote this institutional change.
- It can be detected a shift from informative participatory spaces towards co-responsibility mechanisms, specially in the management of empty urban spaces or the management of public or private urban disused resources.
- These forms of co-responsibility and co-management also involve a dialogue-pressure logic between social activists and the institutions. This is not an idyllic way to encourage participation and presents many ambivalences (participation vs instrumentalization, participation for facilitating the dialogue vs participation for containing the conflict, social engagement vs social disobedience). These ambivalences are part of the political game in the current context of urban crisis.
- In the area of housing, the answers to social demands are more related to responding urgent social needs than to new ways to ensure the social right to housing. The
institutional machinery in this field is not capable to find ways of ‘managing the meantime’ as in the field of empty urban spaces. There are some proposals to experiment with such an approach in the field of housing such as La Casa de las Idees (an institutional open call to find solutions for new models for housing) but with very moderate results. As Carme Trilla told us in an interview «public programs like La Casa de las Idees are more a communication campaign to raise social awareness than a way to find real solutions to the problem of housing.» Carme Trilla was the Housing Secretary at the Catalan Autonomous Government (2006-2010) and is now primarily responsible of the Service of Mediation in Housing of CARITAS.

- Housing cooperatives like Sostre Civic or La Borda - a housing cooperative recently launched in Can Batlló by several neighbourhood and city-level organisations - indicate that even in the housing field, new citizen responses to the urban crisis are being developed. Such responses are beginning to get some support on behalf of public institutions.

5. Synthesis and conclusions

On the basis of the comparison between two salient policy issues related to the crisis effects in Barcelona we can summarize the following findings regarding the evolution of collaborative governance under austerity.

First, former collaborative governance arrangements in Barcelona are not being used as important tools for the management of the consequences of crisis. The new conservative government, the new social movements and some neighbourhood associations are calling the traditional model in question. Critics state that traditional collaborative arrangements are based on meetings without specific objectives, that methodologies are not thought for non-formal social organizations, that there is a huge degree of distrust or that these spaces are designed to inform but unable to execute or implement solutions. Consequently, participatory governance in Barcelona is slowly shifting from spaces already created by previous local governments towards new forms of participation (more issue-focused, more action-oriented, more open and flexible).

At the same time, though, some positive effects of these arrangements are recognized by several stakeholders, like the necessity for some social organizations to take part in these participatory spaces in order to keep informed on local policies. Furthermore, the path-dependency of former participatory structures makes them resistant to retrenchment and changes. We can summarize, thus, that collaborative governance in Barcelona is moving between continuation and reformulation.

Second, a new institutional discourse is emerging focusing its attention on new social actors and trying to mobilise and to incorporate citizens who are not involved in traditional neighbourhood associations. These new social actors can be entrepreneurs, residents, architects, artists, etc. In this context, collaborative governance is moving from informative participatory spaces towards co-responsibility mechanisms, especially in the management of empty urban spaces. These forms of co-responsibility and co-management, though, also involve a dialogue-pressure logic between social activists and the institutions. In sum, we can distinguish three new forms of collaborative governance: a) co-management or co-responsibility mechanisms for solving social demands, like the Pla Buits, b) policies that encourage social innovation, like the Casa de les Idees process and c) bilateral negotiations with social movements like the Platform of Citizens Affected by Mortgages (PAH).
Third, the main shift in the way to tackle crisis effects, however, comes from social movements and community organizations, not from the City Council. Social movements in Barcelona have constructed a new collective imaginary of the housing problem and have evidenced that institutions can’t solve this problem themselves. Contesting the institutional dysfunction in their responsibility to solve public problems, social movements have produced new responses to the right of housing and the self-management of urban resources. This new understanding of participation from below is characterized by its pragmatism and the production of community-based solutions. These new social processes were born and reinforced by 15M but they did not break with the traditional forms of social action: these social movements extract knowledge and resources from the historical course of the previous movements.

Finally, beyond the similarities identified in the analysed policy issues (evictions and urban empty spaces), we can state that the evolution of collaborative governance arrangements in Barcelona is issue-dependent.

Regarding the housing eviction issue we observe, on one hand, a local government that cannot give an effective institutional response to the problem of housing and, on the other hand, an emerging social movement acting daily to respond a growing social demand. As housing is a basic social need and people affected by evictions are the most vulnerable social groups (unemployed, immigrants, etc.), the kind of citizens that are mobilized, its resources and its actions are also very specific. At the same time, though, the movement is characterized by a high degree of coordination and solidarity between organizations, and that also determines its collective action. Moreover, the movement is always going beyond the specific cases of eviction, appealing for a more general basic right: the right to housing. The City Council, though, has not a clear and strategic response to this situation and is acting reactively, recognizing that former mechanisms of collaborative governance are not being useful and creating new spaces that allow the participation of new social actors. However, these new mechanisms continue to have most of the weakness of the previous ones and are not perceived as spaces of trust where effective solutions can be provided. The characteristics of the real-estate market and the previous housing policy are constraining innovative solutions and the City Council is not providing a clear alternative to solve the problem. As a result, social movements are continuing their strategy of disruption and the City Council is forced to bilateral negotiations.

By the contrary, in what concerns empty urban spaces, the City Council is playing a more active role. The institution, in this case, is combining a leadership of new collaborative governance strategies based on co-responsibility and co-management, like Pla Buits, with ad-hoc solutions responding to new social demands for specific empty urban spaces, like Can Batlló. Although the issue is clearly related with the consequences of the crisis, it is not focused on a basic social need, like housing. Most of the new social actors that have emerged in this issue have an important cultural background and have training in architecture, arts or other disciplines. They are younger people that may have more radical approaches than neighbourhood associations but hold them in a more constructive way. They have clearer arguments and, a priori, there is not so much distrust with the local government. However, in many cases they are also connected to traditional social organizations. The construction of a more general discourse based on the right to the city is not so clear in this case and most of the projects are working autonomously. Thus, there is not a high degree of connection and coordination among the cases of community management of empty urban spaces. In this context, the City Council is making a new public policy for this new policy issue based on new forms of collaborative governance.
We conclude that collaborative governance evolution in Barcelona is not only context and path-dependent but also issue-dependent. Both policy issues show how the long history of community organizations and social movements in Barcelona determine the emergence of new grassroots movements after the 15M. In both policy issues, moreover, we can observe a tendency between continuity and reformulation of collaborative governance arrangements. However, neither grassroots movements nor institutional responses are the same in the housing evictions issue and in the management of empty urban spaces.

6. References


