**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# THE REDEFINITION AND CO-PRODUCTION OF PUBLIC SERVICES BY URBAN MOVEMENTS:
## The Can Batlló social innovation in Barcelona

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**ABSTRACT:** A wealth of social innovations sprang up in recent years in Southern Europe in the bosom of urban movements to cover citizens´ needs from below. Reacting to the commodification of the neoliberal city and the increasing dismantling of the welfare state, they provide public services and interrelate in various forms with state authorities. Drawing on the outstanding social innovation case of Can Batlló (CB) in the city of Barcelona, a 14-ha former factory including more than 30 different projects and involving more than 350 activists, this paper analyses how social movements are redefining "the public" in the articulation between institutionalization, public service co-production, disruptive repertoires of action, and autonomy. It argues that this multiplicity of strategies and the strength of the movement helped not only to avoid turning the CB social innovation into a neoliberal rollout strategy, but even to act as a safety cordon against austerity politics. Affecting the boundaries of the legal-institutional framework, and rejecting the conflation of "public goods" with "state goods", CB organizes public services provision and planning in a more democratic form, pressuring the government to deliver the promised public services, while reclaiming them as commons that activists contribute building and designing. CB´s movement dimension and rootedness in the neighbourhood ensure the prioritisation of public and neighbourhood concerns over short-term, particularistic, and organizational survival interests.

**KEYWORDS:** commons, Indignados, movement of the squares, public service, social innovation, State, urban movements

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## 1. Urban movements and public services in the midst of the crisis

The global economic crisis and the increasing deployment of austerity politics contributed to the politicization of urban social movements in Europe and beyond (Mayer, 2012; Zamponi and Bosi, 2018). One fundamental feature of urban movements since at least the turn of the new century lies in their mobilization against the commodification of the neoliberal city and the dismantling of the welfare state. The movement of the square, emerged under the thrust of the global economic crisis represented the climax of this mobilization. Reacting to the intensification of neoliberal governance, growing economic and social hardship, and the commodification of public space, the movement of the squares was a massive cycle of protest sweeping the squares and streets of diverse countries from Tunisia to Island, to Spain and Greece incarnated as *Indignados* movement, then spreading as Occupy movement from the USA to the UK and Israel, and continuing in the following years in different countries such as Mexico and Turkey (Varvarousis et al. 2019; Asara, 2016).

During and after the square occupations, in Sothern European countries the movement intermeshed with and contaminated urban movements with longer historical trajectories, from the squatters´ (Martínez and García, 2015), to the alterglobalization, neighbourhood and environmental movements (Asara, 2016; Karaliotas, 2016; Varvarousis et al. 2019). From solidarity economy initiatives, social centres, and community supported agriculture, to self-managed clinics and pharmacies, workers´ and consumers´ cooperatives, time banks, solidarity exchange networks and other self-organized spaces, new forms of social organization based on solidarity, commoning and collective self-empowerment were forged to meet alienated needs through grassroots initiatives to struggle against social exclusion and for the right to the city (Asara, 2019; Varvarousis et al, 2019, Hadjimichalis 2013, Karaliotas 2016). A wealth of social infrastructure of alternative economic and (re)productive projects blossomed in the afterlives of the movement of the squares, constituting what Varvarousis et al (2019) call "social outcomes" of social movements. The body of literature has variously referred to and analysed them as commons (Varouvarousis et al, 2019), social innovations (Cruz et al., 2017), Sustainable Community Organizations (Forno and Graziano, 2014; Andreatta and Guidi, 2017), Alternative Action Organizations (Bosi and Zamponi, 2015) or Alternative Forms of Resilience (Kousis, 2017). Prefigurative politics, mutualism, commoning and direct social action are some of their repertoires of action and strategies (Bosi and Zamponi, 2015). One important common feature often stressed in this literature is their emphasis on the unmediated character of this collective action, aiming at directly changing some specific aspects of society without focusing primarily on claiming some-

thing from the state or other power holders and public authorities (ibid; Forno and Graziano, 2014). In this sense, this emerging strand of research often witnesses if not a rejection, a disengagement from the state. For example, the ´new commons´ discourse has rarely engaged with state questions, as commons are viewed as being outside the state and the workings of capital (Cumbers, 2012).

However, by seeking the solution to unsatisfied needs outside and beyond both the state and the market, "through actions that aim to provide people with alternative ways of enduring day to day difficulties and challenges in hard economic times" (Zamponi and Bosi, 2018:797), these grassroots initiatives contribute to the production of public services for the neighbourhoods and cities. In so doing, they culminate the transformation of the last two decades of governance and state-based models of service delivery (Moulaert et al. 2010). While based on self-organization, many of these initiatives, by intervening in the production of public services, sometimes with the support of public authorities, contribute to their redefinition, intertwining ´the public´ with the struggle for ´the commons´.

The concept of social innovation, understood as those cooperative processes and practices based on citizen involvement, conceived as public services, and answering material and immaterial needs, while empowering marginalised social groups, is the one that, among the above-mentioned concepts, has most confronted with the question of what does the third sector and civil society provision of public services implies for their redefinition. Yet, as put bluntly by Brandsen and Pestoff (2006:494), "we do not yet have a comprehensive empirical understanding of what happens when the third sector is drawn into public services".

Some of the questions that still merit analytical attention are the following: how are these initiatives redefining public services and building a new meaning of what is "the public"? How are they interrelating with public authorities in the struggle between institutionalization and autonomy?

I look at these questions through the prism of an outstanding case of social innovation´s redefinition of public services, the self-managed former factory *Can Batlló* (CB) in Barcelona. I investigate how a new conception of ´the public´ - what activists call a ´public from the common´ or ´communitarian public´ - is discursively built and implemented through participants´ social practices. Commons and social innovations are two theoretical lenses that can both enhance understanding of this case study. Commons are forms of social innovation, but not all social innovations come with the form of commons, because commons presuppose collective, horizontal forms of decision-making and common management of the commons, which itself is not a defining condition for a social innovation. While I ground my case on social innovation literature, I

put it into dialogue with the commons´ body of work, because although the latter lacks a serious engagement with the state question, its porousness vis-à-vis the public, allows me to better understand the relationship between social innovation, "the public" and the state.

I show that social innovation can be forged as a reaction to the increasing externalization of public services to the private sector and the privatisation of public space. Co-producing and co-governing public services with the support from state institutions, social innovation can empower movement activists and previously non-politicised neighbours and satisfy their daily needs by recasting the distinctions between suppliers, users and technicians, and organizing public services provision and planning in a more democratic form. Social movement-backed social innovation, by blending service co-production with contention and autonomy from a position of strength, may help avoid turning social innovation into a strategy to offload and transfer state responsibility from the state to civil society, within the frame of a rollout neoliberal strategy (Parés et al., 2017; Cruz et al. 2017; Fougère et al, 2017). Carving its own space of autonomy, and engaging with state authorities in a confrontational manner, CB has inspired, and directly affected through activist knowledge, new public service policies. Its "flexible institutionalization" involves the continuous construction of autonomy as a site of struggle, both towards state authorities, and within the activists´ group, striving to reduce dependence from the state by generating alternative economic projects.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section I will look into social innovation, public service co-production, and social movements literature. In the third section I will explain my research design and methodology, and explicate my case study, detailing its numerous projects and ways of interrelating with state authorities. I discuss these findings in the fourth section, and conclude with some final remarks.

## 2. Social innovation in the transformation of welfare arrangements

New modalities of governance have emerged in the last three decades, and increasingly so following the global economic crisis, characterised by at least two broad and connected processes. On the one hand,  a reorganization of the public sector around regulatory mechanisms of marketization and privatisation, a restructuring of the welfare state from universally defined rights and duties towards activation and ´tailor-made´ individually-based regulations, and welfare and public sector cuts, generating higher levels of poverty and inequalities (Taylor-Gooby et al, 2017). On the other hand, the shift from government to governance, including public-private partnerships and

"roll-out neoliberalism", decentralization and the activation of civil society, transferring to individuals and communities new forms of citizenship (Bifulco, 2017; Swyngedouw, 2005). The localization of welfare has occurred through the logics of "devolution of penury" (Mény and Wright, 1985, cited in Bifulco, 2017:47), whereby austerity cuts have particularly affected local states and, after the crisis, were soon combined in countries such as Spain with a "logics of re-centralisation" (Martí Costa and Tomàs, 2017:2118; Bifulco, 2017:49). However, the rescaling of social policies to urban and regional levels in the context of the crisis has also favoured the emergence of new actors and initiatives oriented towards redistribution and participation goals, as epitomised in the social innovation concept (Bifulco, 2017; Eizaguirre et al, 2017).

In the last three decades, the debate on social innovation has gained considerable impetus, constituting a proper field. The literature presents various foci and approaches, many of them taking an economistic drift, or a managerial and technical focus, such as an excessive reliance on technological improvements, or a mainstream approach aligned with "Big Society" approach in the UK, which sees community initiatives and third sector as a response and justification for public expenditure (see Parés et al. 2017 for a review). In this article I will rely on what has been defined as the "radical approach" (Cruz et al. 2017:225) and "disruptive theories" (Parés et al.2017:19) of social innovation. Within this perspective, social innovation occurs when collective action and the mobilization of institutional forces succeed in bringing about three elements: a) the satisfaction of previously alienated needs (material, social, political or existential); b) the empowerment of marginalised social groups through the enhancement of capabilities; and c) changes in power and governance relations towards a more democratic governance system (Martinelli, 2010: 42; Gonzalez et al., 2010:54; Vicari Haddock and Moulaert, 2009). This perspective points to the gaps and interstices in welfare provisions which became increasingly occupied by third sector initiatives outside of the purely state-based arrangements (Swyngedouw and Moulaert, 2010), and to the emergence of new state-market-civil society constellations, as epitomized in social economy initiatives. This conception of social innovation sees the local scale, and more particularly urban neighbourhoods, as "pivotal sites for initiating and implementing social change that may ripple through the city" (Moulaert, 2010:5), which can then be articulated through a scalar politics with institutions and processes at other spatial scales, engendering broader political-economic transformations (Swyngedouw and Moulaert, 2010: 226).

An "intertwined process" (Novy and Leubolt, 2005:2023, 2033) or dialectical relationship between state and civil society actors is an important ingredient for the actual emergence of social innovation (Gonzalez et al., 2010), especially in those communities

and neighbourhoods where collective action capabilities are weaker (Cruz et al, 2017). The probability of success of social innovations depends to an important extent on their ability to be supported financially and legally with political and administrative allies at different scales with whom to secure a certain protection and promotion (Vitale, 2009; Moulaert, 2010).

While the shifting modalities of service delivery make the boundaries between state, market and civil society appear increasingly blurred, it is important to note that voluntary and non-profit organization have traditionally played a major role in providing public services in many European countries, creating welfare arrangements on their own, from mutual organisations in the field of social security, to cooperatives and early social enterprises (Evers and Ewert, 2015; Pestoff, 2009). For this reason some authors prefer to talk about local welfare systems, or welfare mix, which encompasses the local welfare state, the third sector, and the social economy sector (Evers and Ewert, 2015; Unger, 2015). In the next section I explain more in depth the concept of co-production.

## 2.1 Co-production of public services and commons

The concept of co-production was first introduced by E. Ostrom and colleagues during the late 1970s as a heuristic tool to "struggle with the dominant theories of urban governance underlying policy recommendations of massive centralizations" (Ostrom, 1996:1079) in developing countries. Coproduction meant the "synergy" between government and citizens, encouraged by the establishment of "rules-in-use" to foster participation in a locality, whereby an "active role of citizens in producing public goods and services of consequence to them" (ibid:1073) both in the design and maintenance of services can empower them and improve the quality of the service by tailoring them to local needs (ibid:1081). Building on rational choice theory, this strand of work influenced the public administration theory on coproduction in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the more recent work on Citizens´ Initiatives (CI). The former looked at citizen coproduction as one important way not only to increase and improve service delivery, but also to reduce the costs of producing urban services in times of fiscal stress (Percy, 1984; Levine and Fisher, 1984:181).

Recent public management research has stressed that these forms of co-operation could potentially revitalise democratic political systems and the welfare state (ibid; Pestoff, 2009; Pestoff et al. 2006). Promoting greater citizen participation in the provision of welfare services through cooperative self-management of social services, where citizens participate directly in the production of the local services they demand, as us-

ers and producers of such services, in this light means empowering both the workers and clients of these services (Pestoff, 2009).

Co-production of public services has also been analysed by the more recent strand on Citizens´ Initiatives. While this has followed the same rational choice approach, differently from the reform rhetoric of the 1980s and 1990s, CIs are generally not seen as a strategy of public-private partnership and welfare retrenchment "devised" by public authorities, but as local community activities aimed at providing  local public goods or services in their locality (e.g. in the fields of liveability, public safety and social cohesion of neighbourhoods) in which citizens  play a key role in their formulation and implementation (Bakker et al. 2012; Denters, 2016). Literature on CIs has focused on the factors explaining participation in CIs and their success, which have typically included: socioeconomic status and participants´ resources; motivations and social needs; social capital, civic infrastructure and attachment to place; and institutional design or rules-in-use to foster participation (Denters, 2016; Bakker et al., 2012; Lowndes et al., 2006; Marschall, 2004). However, while the CI literature has focused on the "product of co-production" and on "the functionality of operational services", it has missed an understanding of co-production "as a *political process* that citizens engage with to secure changes in their relations with government and state agencies, in addition to improvements in basic services" (Mitlin, 2008:352, my emphasis). Also, it has "not located co-production within a broader struggle for choice, self-determination and meso-level political relations in which citizens both seek an engagement with the state (e.g. to secure redistribution, etc.) and also are oriented towards self-management and local control over local provision in areas related to basic needs" (Mitlin, 2008:347). This involves an analysis of "movements´ engagement in the practical day to day needs of citizens, and their political aspirations for political inclusion and redistribution goals" (ibid:353).

A "scant connection" (Blanco and Léon, 2017:2175) between social movements and service co-production can be found in some literature on social innovation. Increasingly after the Great Recession in Mediterranean countries, movements have arisen in response to political and social challenges posed by neoliberal governance and to the weakness of public policies (ibid; Mitlin, 2018). Social innovation are indeed often the "historical heritage" of social movements (Moulaert et al. 2010:58), as they emerge out of the negotiations between civil society organizations and public administration after a period of opposition and collective mobilisation (Eizaguirre et al. 2012). When solid ties are (still) in place between third sector organizations managing the co-production of public services, on the one hand, and social movements or a plurality of civil society organizations, on the other, these can safeguard against or at least constrain nonprofits´ self-interested behaviour and organizational survival concerns, serving the larger

public interest, according to the principles of justice and inclusion, and in light of movements´ ideals (Borzaga and Fazzi, 2014; Chin, 2009).

Social innovation spurred and backed by social movements can employ and eventually combine different strategies: contentious politics with autonomy, negotiation with public authorities in the co-production of services with solidarity practices to counteract the effects of austerity and to improve material conditions (Blanco and Léon, 2017; Mitlin, 2018). A "dialectic between integration and autonomy" (Swyngedouw and Moulaert, 2010:226), can find a balance between cooperation, state institutionalization and oppositional tactics. Combining disruptive and confrontational actions with a radical politics of autonomy (Martínez 2014), a ´flexible institutionalization´ (Membretti, 2010) may develop in continuous tension between the need for structure (division of labour, differentiation of competences and bridges with institutions), and the need for flexibility (informality, osmosis with movements, versatility). Movements´ strength can help social innovation to "transgress the boundaries of legal, accepted behaviour", forcing the government to "do its job", ensuring that services are delivered (Wolford, 2010:95), while keeping an openly critical approach to insufficient policy action (De Weerdt and Garcia, 2016). In this way, movements can represent the urban poor and mediate their claims to public services, giving them voice, and seeing themselves as accountable to the public (Wolford, 2010). Social innovations, on their turn, can be an important platform for nurturing the collective capacity necessary for social mobilization (Blanco and Léon, 2017).

However, as put by Mitlin (2018:572), the combination of these multiples strategies and "the ways movement define and defend their autonomy has received insufficient consideration". It is crucial to understand what type of social and political processes and conditions can foster a democratised public ownership, rather than a social-tinted neoliberal innovation or even third sector co-production of public services serving the imperatives of organizational survival.

In the overall research endeavour of how to democratize public ownership, Cumbers (2012) redefines the latter as encompassing all those attempts, both outside and through the state, that reclaim economic space from capitalist social relations, or else all collective ownership subject to collective forms of decision-making, including commons. Commons can be defined as social systems at different scales of action, within which resources are managed and used collectively by a community according to a set of collectively defined formal or informal shared institutions[1] (Varvarousis et al, 2019;

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[1] While the work of Ostrom is of fundamental importance for the theory on the commons, her approach, mostly directed to analyse the conditions for effective management of Common-Pool Resources, differs from the one taken in this work. Ostrom´s work has often eschewed dealing with broader socio-political processes and capitalist dynamics. As

De Angelis, 2017). Cumbers (2012) advocates for a pluralistic and decentred approach to public ownership, privileging diversity and experimentation with different forms of public ownership in line with local needs and aspirations, openness, democratic deliberation and even contestation, "as a way of combating the centralization and concentration of economic power and decision-making" (ibid:81). In a comparable way, for Harvey (2012, p.73) movements should engage with a double-pronged political attack to demand more public goods to the state, while appropriating and generating new commons. Attempting to remedy the lack of engagement of the commons body of literature with the state question, here I aim to analyse what kind of relationship can be established between the local state, social innovations in the form of commons, and social movements.

How can social movements produce, practically and discursively build "the public" in the articulation between movement dimension and social innovation institutionalization? How can social movements redefine and reclaim public ownership (and justify its redefinition) by combining different strategies? And how can the "experimental provision of public services not for profit" (Unger, 2015:247) contribute to "think of the current policies of welfare reform and policies for social innovation together" (Evers and Ewert, 2015:124)?

In the next section I will explain the research design and methodology of this study.

## 3. The case study of Can Batlló

### 3.1 Research design and methodology

I aim to analyse the above mentioned questions by means of a case study of the Can Batlló social innovation in the city of Barcelona. In Spain, the ´Indignados´ movement, the incarnation of the movement of the squares in the Spanish context, during its afterlife interwove with many pre-existing movements and claims, from the squatting to the autonomous, neighbourhood and environmental (justice) movements. I focus on the Can Batlló (CB) case because 1) it is a reference example, and the most powerful and large scale initiative of self-managed public provision by a social movement platform in the city, 2) it is a case of social innovation supported by a heterogeneous coalition of social movements; 3) it engages with state institutions through complex relationships.

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summarized by De Angelis (2017:42): "in this mainstream approach, to be a common good is purely a property of the thing, not of the plurality giving social meaning to the thing".

I use a triangulation of different methods: participant observation; 22 in-depth interviews with CB, of which 21 with activists and one with the Municipality Advisor for Social Innovation; 2 mini-focus groups; analysis of documents and literature produced by CB; and thematic analysis of interviews. While the bulk of fieldwork concentrated onto the period between October 2012 and May 2014 (including 16 out of the 24 interviews/focus groups), I carried out 8 of the interviews during two subsequent periods: January-February 2016 and February 2019. This longitudinal analysis allowed me to follow the evolution of the CB social innovation from its nascent stage to the process of institutionalization.

Interviewees were selected by attempting to cover different kind of activism (different CB sub-groups) and participation in the movement, in a deliberate sampling process guided by theoretical considerations and striving for completeness (see Blee and Taylor, 2002). Interviewees are working- and middle- class residents with high rates of precarization among the youngsters, and several of them are working in some of the economic activities created by CB.  About one third of interviewees are female, and age is comprised between late 20s to 75 years old. Their general motivation to participate to CB is linked to the "struggle to transform society" (I83), combined with the concrete interest for the activities of specific committees they are taking part to, and (for some of them), an economic motivation of combining work with activism.

Interviews and mini-focus groups with the CB participants focused on the origins, organizational structure, activities, and type of sub-projects of CB, how and why activists became involved, and why they do what they do, their relationships with neighbours and state authorities, and their transformational visions. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed through a thematic analysis methodology (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Participant observation was carried out between October 2012 and May 2014. I took part to several CB General Assemblies and meetings of specific committees, as well as main events, celebrations, and activities.


### 3.2 Can Batlló: the Trojan horse of social innovation

In Spain, the economic crisis was compounded with the bursting of the real estate bubble bringing about around 500.000 evicted families between 2007 and 2011, and an unemployment rate of 22%, and 47% among youngsters (February 2011), while at-risk-of-poverty rates for the population grew from 19.8 to 22.1% in 2015 (Guillén and Pavolini, 2017). In the city of Barcelona, socio-economic data were similarly appalling, with an unemployment rate of 18%, with peaks of 40%-45% for youngsters, and more

than 3,000 families evicted yearly during the crisis´ years (data of 2013). Radical re-forms took place in pension and labour market policies, and all other policy fields were severely affected by the new budgetary cuts starting from 2010-11. Sub-national gov-ernments were the most hit by dramatic cuts in resources transferred by central gov-ernment (Guillén and Pavolini, 2017; Martí-Costa and Tòmas, 2017). Combined with corruption scandals and decreasing trust in political institutions, this set the scene for the emergence of a new wave of protest.

In May 2011 the Indignados movement arose following the massive demonstration with the slogan "Real Democracy Now. We are not merchandise in the hands of politi-cians and bankers", occupying the main squares of more than 70 Spanish cities, with massive deliberations in general assemblies and many thematic committees (Asara, 2016). This was accompanied by the powerful surge of the housing movement in sup-port of evicted people, and of anti-austerity movements in defence of public services. Following the 2010 Constitutional Court´s verdict on the unconstitutionality of the 2005 reform of the Statute of Autonomy, and the virtual "ruling out" of the federalist option, the political and grassroots movement for Catalan political independence at least in part was further strengthened by discontent with the new strong budgetary re-strictions at the regional level, and with what was perceived as a mistreatment in the way Catalonia contribute to the Spanish budget (Martí-Costa and Tòmas, 2017: Della Porta et al. 2017). The miserable way in which the question around the right to self-determination was handled by the Spanish central government increasingly led to the perception by a part of urban movements of Spanish state structures as being anach-ronistic and non-democratic (ibid), fuelling engagement with the "local state" and af-fecting the local party system as well as urban movements´ grievances in various and complex ways.

In Barcelona, on 11 June, less than one month after Plaça Catalunya´s start of the occupation, when some of the encampments had not been removed yet, a 'ludic demonstration' of about 1,000 people entered the fenced Can Batlló industrial area, already claimed for public use by urban movements since 40 years back, and celebrat-ed the seizure of one of its industrial units, negotiated with the local state. This was fol-lowed by the constitution of the first committees and deliberations on what projects to implement in the space. Let´s see more closely how this movement appropriation came to happen, and its historical roots.

Since 1973 the 14-ha former textile factory Can Batlló had been claimed for public use in an intense mobilization campaign steered by the *Sants* Social Centre (SSC), lead-ing to the 1976 General Urban Development Plan (GUDP) foreseeing in it a green space and several public facilities. Given the failure to start the implementation of these

plans, since 2009 the citizens´ platform "Can Batlló is for the neighbourhood" (hereafter CB platform), composed of participants of the neighbourhood, squatting and cooperative movements, a group of architecture students subsequently organized as *LaCol* cooperative, and later Indignados activists, started a mobilization campaign with a public countdown, menacing the occupation of the site, if the works did not start by June 2011. A few days before the declared entrance day, one of the blocks was ceded to the CB platform by the municipality through a non-legally binding contract, rendering the occupation unnecessary. This 'appropriation' success can be explained by the strong media campaign, the change in the municipal government, but most of all by the very climate of turmoil created by the burst of the *Indignados* movement, instilling fear in the newly elected city council.

CB is located in the middle-low income *La Bordeta* neighbourhood, part of the Sants district, renowned for its vibrant community life and social fabric. Since June 2011, CB is a self-managed umbrella project involving more than 350 active participants and about thirty projects. The seizure of the 1,500 square metre "Block 11" unit was conceived as a "Trojan horse" to enable the expansion to other units. As put by a participant: "starting from here we are going to englobe other spaces in order to collocate our projects, our projects but to the service of the neighbourhood" (I60:400). The expansion onto many other industrial units and blocks did indeed actualize, together with an increase of participants.

The General Assembly is the sovereign decision-making body, but various autonomous committees such as the Space Design, Strategy and Negotiation, Activities, Economics and Coordination Committees take decisions on specific matters. CB is responsible for the design and content of the space, and assumes expenses linked to ordinary management, but the costs linked to refurbishment, bills, maintenance of the building, and construction of some spaces such as the Auditorium are covered by the municipality. Also, CB gets small teams of previously unemployed specialized workers resident of the *Sants* district, which are hired for infrastructure works by the Municipal and Catalan Agencies for Employment and Development.

Until the beginning of 2013 a broad participatory process was carried out to decide what projects to implement in the space and the criteria for their approval and constant validation. Within the context of the large mobilizations and the different social climate spurred by the Indignados movement, as well as the fierce socio-economic conditions linked to the crisis, a group of activists "saw CB as a possibility where to intervene from a political and socio-economic point of view, we didn´t know much how, until we entered the space" (I85:48). A conspicuous part of participants came from the squatting, neighbourhood and cooperative movements, and for them it was clear that

CB was the opportunity to go further than the "typical social centre or neighbourhood claim for public space" (I85:42), involving also broader political issues linked to housing, work, consumption, education, health, and the economy. As recalled by a participant:

> We introduced this question in the participatory process of CB: ´do we want that CB be only a communitarian space or that it also acts like an agent of transformation for the usual circuits and parameters  our life is embedded in Sants?´. The answer was yes and from there many of us started to develop different projects that go beyond the climbing wall, or the space for doing dance courses and so on (I85:53).

Three criteria were established for the validation of projects: 1) their socio-economic viability, 2) their transformational potentiality, and 3) their close ties with the surroundings/neighbourhood. These criteria would ensure that CB would turn into a social innovation, bringing about at least the first two of the three outcomes that define social innovations.

The bulk of the first projects implemented were mostly related to the cultural and recreational spheres and included: the first public library of the neighbourhood, a 15,000-book self-managed library; the Bar, the Auditorium; sports recreational and artistic spaces; and carpentry and infrastructure/construction works´ projects. All projects provide what participants call a "social return", namely wider social benefits and public services for the broader CB project and neighbourhood, in the form of workshops, assistance or other available resources on a weekly basis: from vehicle repair assistance to refurbishment works regenerating the industrial estate, from workshops on beer production, composition typography, theatre, or dance to language courses and children´s shared care and recreational space etc. Remunerative projects should also devote part of their revenue to the common fund - used for non-remunerative projects and for common goals and needs - subject to the General Assembly´s decisions. All projects´ collectives are also meant to participate and get involved in the wider CB project, at least by taking part to the General Assembly and Coordination Committee.

Meanwhile, CB gradually expanded both to other blocks, through a collective refurbishment process (led by the Infrastructure Committee) and modifications of the GUDP (pushed by the Strategy and Negotiation Committees), and at the level of projects/content. In 2012 the following projects materialized: a community urban garden mostly for use of migrants of a nearby Church Association and of a group of disabled people; a food bank; the Collective Printing, devoted to recuperating, innovating and educating on composition typography; an ecological brewery collective (mostly for the bar's use); a social movements documentation centre; and spaces for theatre rehearsal and vehicles (self)repair. Since 2013-2014 several additional projects followed, such as

the *Descontrol* Publishing Cooperative, with various book collections; the Mobility project focused on vehicles repair assistance and DIY; *La Fondona* feminist and LGBTIQ+ collective, organizing a library documentary collection and cultural activities; the *Coopnet* ecological cleaning cooperative; and the *Sants Cooperative Impulse* Association, putting together all workers´ cooperatives and solidarity and community economy initiatives in the Sants district. Other pre-existing projects were also incorporated into the CB project, such as the *Espurna* children´s recreational project and agroecological consumption cooperatives such as *La Garrofera*. Also, in these years two wider-reaching, more autonomous[2] projects started to be implemented, seeing their actualization between 2016 and 2018 respectively: the social and solidarity economy incubator *Coòpolis*, and the ecological grant-of-use (co-)housing cooperative *La Borda*.

*La Borda* lies on a public land devoted to affordable housing for lower income citizens, and it comprises 28 family units living in a 75-years-cession of use tenancy regime inspired by the Danish Andel model. The largest of its kind in Catalonia, cooperative housing under a use lease scheme is a non speculative model of housing according to use value. The ownership of the newly-constructed building belongs to the not-for-profit housing cooperative, which grants the right to use each dwelling to each family unit through a cession of use contract in exchange for an entry quota (to be returned upon leave) and monthly fee, which serve to cover the cost of the debt contracted to construct the building and its future maintenance (see also Cabré and Andrés, 2018). In contrast to other types of social housing in Catalonia and Spain, whose construction is externalised to a private construction company that later owns the dwellings, the long-term lease use, the collective/cooperative property of the building and its eventual returning in public hands after the end of the contract prevent the possible selling of dwellings to the private market after a few years at a higher price, rubbing off its "social" dimension. In the case of *La Borda*, the state enters this scheme by providing the lot, and by ensuring the housing affordability requirement, and the targeting of lower-income population.

The 6-floor wooden, low-environmental impact building was designed using an assembly-based participatory process for architectural design with technical expertise from *LaCol*. Assembly decision-making processes continue to characterize its communal life, fostered by shared common facilities and spaces. The building´s construction, totalling 3,25 million euros, was financed through the users´ fees, participatory bonds,

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[2] These two projects carry out negotiations with municipal authorities in an autonomous and direct manner. A third, more autonomous, but slowly advancing project, is the libertarian (cooperative and public) school Arcadia.

ethical finance and only at a later stage a subsidy from the Spanish government of a half million euros.

As avowed by the Municipality Advisor for Social Innovation, *La Borda* is "inspirational", and "a reference point" (I86) for social and cooperative housing policies in the city, and similar programs were initiated with the new government.

The second wide-reaching project is *Coòpolis*, the Barcelona Cooperative Centre, working to promote the social and solidary economy as a tool to reduce inequalities, strengthen the local socio-economic tissue and generate a different economy that gives priority to "people´s real needs", the environment, and the local territory (Coòpolis, 2018). The original ideational study prepared by *La Ciutat Invisible* and *LaCol*, commissioned by a small grant by the municipality, later inspired the very definition of the Catalan policy, which would have funded it two years later. Indeed, *Coòpolis* is part of the Catalan program "Network of Cooperative centres" composed of 14 centres spread across Catalonia, for which it is responsible of the Barcelona section. In the Barcelona Plan for the Social and Solidarity Economy (2016-2019) *Coòpolis* is defined as "an emblematic city project, a reference and inspiration" (Barcelona Municipality, 2016:56). *Coòpolis* receives funding from both the Catalan and Barcelona state authorities for carrying out its work.[3]

To reach its goals, *Coòpolis* works closely with the city neighbourhoods, the social and solidarity economy local networks, the Workers´ Cooperatives Federation, ethical finance initiatives, and the state administration. However, as pointed out by one of its founders,

> the state authorities participate not as a protagonist of the project but as entities that had to give a support to an initiative emerged from the territory and the cooperative base. This was the challenge for us, we don´t want to be the office of *Barcelona Activa* [the municipal agency for local economic development], specialised on social economy, so to say, instead it is something different, this is something where the protagonist are the territory and the social economy sector and it receives support from the administrations. The two things are not the same (I85:66).

In 2018, 1,750 participants were attended, 60 cooperatives were supported and 54 new job placements were created (Coòpolis, 2019), and in the period 2016-2018 more than 50 new cooperatives were born as a result of *Coòpolis´* work. *Coòpolis* is run by

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[3] Considering both municipal and national (Catalonia) finance, Coòpolis receives a yearly funding of approximately half million euros, the bulk of it coming from the Catalan government. The municipality also provides the location.

the two main cooperatives that initiated it, *LaCol* and *La Ciutat Invisible*, which have also been two of the actors animating the CB experiment, and by other 16 cooperatives that later joined the initiative.

In general, there has been a blossoming of cooperatives even within CB itself, with at least 7 new collectives turning into or created as cooperatives, additionally to the pre-existing ones contributing to the CB project. Eight CB projects include remunerated work.

CB increasingly experienced a process of institutionalization. Two job positions have been for the first time recently opened in 2019 for carrying out administrative work for the Activities and Secretariat Committees. In March 2019, CB, under the newly acquired Association legal status, was finally granted the 50-year (30+10+10) concession of use of 13,000 square metre space of the industrial area by the city council. To be able to receive such an exceptionally long use lease, CB calculated all the gratuitous working time invested into the manifold activities, and showed the quality and extent of its public services in a special report: in 2017 a total of almost 70,000 voluntary hours were estimated to be carried out by 370 activists, organizing more than 2,000 activities, and involving almost 50,000 users (Can Batlló, 2018).

## 4. Building communitarian public services

One driving force for CB´s emergence and endurance was the thrust "to cover neighbours´ needs" (I65:246), to reclaim the vast vacant space that was promised almost 40 years back for public use, appropriate it, and actualize what the state had not been capable of providing. Given *La Bordeta* neighbourhood's dearth of public facilities, a core objective of CB is "to achieve spaces for the neighbourhood" (I55:46). While CB also demands, in pair with the Neighbours´ Association, that many of the public facilities committed by the municipality since the 1976 GUDP be built and managed by the administration[4], CB´s main endeavour is to co-produce some of the facilities originally planned by the GUDP - the cultural and young people centre, social housing, and the park - together with many new projects and public services, with the support of the regional and municipal authorities.

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[4] The first healthcare centre of the neighbourhood was recently built, and the sport centre is currently being claimed.

Activists variously define what they are building as "public from the common" and "communitarian (cooperative) public", where its "public" feature, ensured by the public character of its provision and the public property of the estate, is managed by the community and the cooperative sector, rather than the state or the private actors. According to CB participants, communitarian public initiatives should complement state-managed public services and "be conducive to having more public services, that we work more from ´the public´" (I84). CB is hence a social innovation that embodies Harvey´s double-pronged political attack, pressuring the government to deliver the promised public services, while reclaiming them as commons that they contribute building and designing. Similarly to Wolford (2010:95), the movement platform has managed to "transgress the boundaries of legal, accepted behaviour". As participants point out, "if we didn´t enter here inside, here there would be nothing" (I60:238), their seizure of the CB space pushed the local state "to rush, to put in motion, and be involved, investing in this city space" (I84:173). The 50-year concession of use of the 13,000 square metre CB industrial area is a foremost example of this forcing and adapting of the boundaries of what was previously allowed, innovating into the legal institutional framework. The concession of use is unique in its kind and there are no comparable previous instance of concessions in the municipal and Catalan context. This amounts to a change, albeit small, of governance relations (Gonzalez et al. 2010).

For activists, "all of us should build the public everyday", as the state is hardly capable to produce all needed public services alone because there are "great limitations to its real capabilities" even when governments are led by progressive leftist parties (I84:89). Such mixed systems of management of public services from both the state and from the third sector is for them important because it reduces public sector´s vulnerability to the "relations of class and of economic power, and to the political cycle and a 4 year dialectics" as compared to attributing "the entire responsibility to manage the public in all realms to the state in a definitive manner" (I82:416). Participants recognise that third sector management is not an entirely new phenomenon. As some activists from the Arcadia project - a cooperative public school still under discussion with the local state authorities - commented, learning from the past, the cooperative model of service provision could potentially act as a safety cordon for public service protection:

> What we are considering, from Can Batlló, is that clearly when schools were cooperative, they were already doing a public service. After they were converted into State ones [in the 1990s], schools lost autonomy, and lost resources, for example now that they are cutting education, so they lost much of the public quality they had. So we say ´well, may-

> be if the cooperative model was kept but with the support from the state, maybe now there would not be any cuts´ (I76:530).

In CB the state supports and in some cases co-designs the delivery of services to guarantee their universality and gratuity. For example in *Coòpolis* state funds are important in order for services "to be directed to all the population groups that are traditionally impervious to employment policies, and state resources allowed to deploy work programmes devoted to these groups, requiring an additional effort on the part of projects to be able to reach them" (I85:78).

Opposing the externalization of public services to the private sector which turn social rights into lucrative services for private industries, "expulsing from the cycle of public services wide marginalised sections of the population because they are not profitable" (I82:416), activists see themselves as mediating some of these residents´ claims, and serving neighbours´ needs. Participants advocate for "displacing the neoliberal conception of the public-private partnership to the public-cooperative-communitarian partnership" (I85:242). Their communitarian management of public services counters the private management of "the public", while being cognisant that they are only acting as "a plaster on a very large wound, we are trying to heal a part of this problem" (I82:432). By recognising the structural causes which contributed to CB´s emergence and questioning the political status quo, social innovation can hardly embody the neoliberal Janus face of governance (Swyngedouw, 2005; Fougère et al. 2017).

The production of services is undertaken with close contact and a certain degree of porousness towards neighbours and other local actors, which can themselves propose public services and projects to be implemented in the space. The projects are accountable to the General Assembly, itself open for participation. As put by a participant, the communitarian public services "can be more resilient and interesting, and empower much more, generating community, as compared to the centralized administration with its bureaucracy" (I84:117). Communitarian public provision recast the distinction between suppliers, technicians and users and the conventional settings typical of service provision (see also Membretti, 2010). Citizens are not "passive users" or "clients" (Ostrom, 1996) of public services, but through assembly decision-making processes (self)manage, plan, design, and produce the services which are subject to the validation of the General Assembly. This empowers citizens who participate directly in the production and management of the services of which in some cases they are themselves contemporaneously users. Regenerating a disused industrial area, participants contribute to another type of urbanism, what they call cooperative urbanism, in a participa-

tory way, which re-joins the "dichotomic" roles of technician and user: "a technician is always a user and a user is always a daily technician because he is the one that is going to use the space" (I76:119).

At the same time, movements and organized civil society have knowledge on the territory, on social economy and the third sector out of the reach of the local state and administration. On one hand, as highlighted by the co-production and CI literature, co-production can tailor services to the specific needs of users, and on the other hand, it is an invaluable asset for local authorities. This was for example clearly the case of *Coòpolis*, which inspired and directly contributed to the formulation of the new social economy policy "Network of Cooperative Centres", through a close exchange with the officials in charge of the program´s definition, "incorporating regularly new things" (I85:275) during its drafting. As put by an activist, "they recognised that we have all the knowledge relating to social and solidarity economy which they don´t have" (I85:90).

One important concern for activists is the need to constitute autonomous projects which, even when benefiting from financial support from the administrative apparatus, would not be dependent on subsidies for their own survival, so as to be armoured against changes in the political-institutional landscape. Toward this goal, the autonomy of CB, in terms of capacity to self-determine its activities and spheres of action, is thought to be linked to the generation of an alternative economy, and income producing projects such as *Coòpolis* or the *Descontrol* Publishing Cooperative serve to strengthen the broader CB project:

> Our aim is that we could really use the economic structure of cooperatives´ social economy in order to give powerful structure to the self-sufficiency of CB. The plan is that inside the CB context there should be structures that have an economic project that serve to give consistency to the general project in which there are many things that require economic means to provide services that can be for free or almost (I82:346).

CB is economically self-reliant for ordinary, everyday management and for most of the financing of activities, but gets state funding for infrastructure and big maintenance works. *Coòpolis* also receives regular subsidies for its services, and *La Borda* will benefit from a lump-sum payment from the Spanish government. Participants however accept funding only whenever they are autonomous to manage it in the desired manner, without involving "conditions in return". For example, the CB Auditorium architectural design was undertaken by the CB collective *LaCol* and approved by the General Assembly, but the more than 100,000 euros required for its construction were disbursed by the municipal government. Clearly, autonomy here does not involve any disengagement from the state: since its birth CB has been interrelating with state officials for the

progressive cession of use of the industrial area, pressuring the state to fulfil its obligations to build some of the public facilities enshrined in the GUPD, and negotiating modifications to the GDUP to meet neighbours´ needs.

This type of autonomy is also obtained by assuming a multiplicity of strategies, including collaboration and a confrontational stance towards the local administration, whereby gains such as cessions of use are obtained thanks to the "position of strength" (Mitlin, 2018:561) granted by the force of the movement, and by the extensive participation of users and activists. Conflictive negotiations are carried out both with government officials for example when discussing changes to the urban plans, and with administrative technicians when deciding upon more specific issues such as the design of the park. This can involve the instrument of menace or retaliation, e.g. by means of media campaign and massive demonstrations. As recalled by a participant, when the 50-year concession of use contract was being prepared and discussed with the various political parties, before the vote in the municipal council, "there has been negotiation [with political parties] and we said ´if you vote against the concession you are going to realize what will happen´, this was the menace that CB presented to some parties" (20:522). Participants also threatened to squat the space, declaring to political parties that "we won´t move from there, and we will continue being the same" (I81:43).

The autonomy and assertive political position of CB is backed by its vast number of users and its porousness to the local community, turning it into a neighbourhood´s space. Neighbours can participate in different degrees: they take part to the many workshops and services provided by CB as users, use the facilities for their activities, take part to the ad-hoc open assemblies and participatory workshops to decide upon urban plans´ changes, and to the monthly General Assemblies. This neighbourhood´s space feature was also conducive to getting public funding, as it "helped to get more [state] support than it would have got if it were a solely politicized and radical leftist space, which would have born some limitations" (I84:525).

In *Coòpolis*, the only project receiving regular subsidies for carrying out its activities, political autonomy is carved by negotiating and collaborating with state authorities at different scales and of different political colour, eschewing financial dependence from a single provider. This autonomous stance is also made possible through through strong links with important civil society actors of the local social and solidarity economy and territory, eschewing being a mere "manager of subsidies" that "loses its social function" (I85:259), following organizational survival rather than public interests.

The communitarian public character of its services even implies that *Coòpolis* goes beyond its contracted obligations with state authorities, exceeding the tasks and func-

tions enshrined in the funding schemes. The words of a leading Coòpolis figure are revealing (I85:275):

> We always told the same thing to both the city council and the Government of Catalonia: ´we are going to agree on a work plan. We are going to fulfil it and furthermore we are going to fulfil it with less resources than the ones you are giving us´. So we tell them ´starting from there I am going to do whatever I want with your money", yes indeed, ´because we comply with what we are supposed to do, but we will do more things, and for what we are going to do in excess I am not even going to consult you, dear city council, and dear Catalan government, because this is either *a demand expressed by the territory*, or a *demand expressed by the [cooperative] sector* and here you shall not say anything.

In this sense, the meaning of "public" followed by a movement-backed third sector platform is perceived to go beyond the more restricted meaning of "public" when conflated with "state". In a comparable manner, *La Borda´*s collective property fosters use values that prioritize common concerns over individualistic or chrematistic ones beyond contractual obligations. Aspiring to preserve the housing cooperative even after the 75-year use lease contract with the city council, members committed to continue to pay the monthly fees even after the debt will be entirely paid off, in order to support other cooperative housing projects:

> After we will have returned the debt, we will continue paying the monthly quota, we have so decided, so we will start to generate our own economic resources in order to give credit or support to new housing cooperatives, *this is a political commitment* (I82:81).

The unprecedented coalition of various movements breeding the initial CB platform, encompassing from the more traditional neighbourhood movement to the Indignados participants, from the autonomous, cooperative and squatting movements, to the environmental activism and political consumerism groups and the feminist and LGBT movement, contribute to the continuous concern to make CB a "public" space, proactively open towards the neighbourhood. As recalled by a participant, CB´s openness and neighbouring feature implies that "neighbours that were previously not politicised join it just because they think it is a nice and interesting project".

CB´s flexible institutionalization (Membretti, 2010) strives to find a balance between autonomy and institutionalization, between increase of specialization and complexification of competences, and preservation of its consensus, assembly-based democratic

structure, between osmosis with movements and division of labour and professionalization, managing political autonomy in the absence of complete economic self-sufficiency. This has inevitably involved some internal tensions and continuous debates. As put by a participant: "every time we contemplate a change, and there is always some change, there are about two years of reflections until we decide to do something and then another year to carry it through" (I81:199). Examples are the decisions to turn the CB platform into a legal association- a legal requirement for the concession of use – or to open job posts for carrying out administrative work, or to start generating economic, remunerative activities. However, these tensions never escalated into a "real conflict" (I81:311), partly because the dialogue with institutions was ingrained in CB´s project since the start, while the division of labour inside CB (i.e. the Negotiation and Strategy Committees are responsible for negotiating with political authorities), and the internal consensus-seeking democracy structure helped to keep frictions at a low level.

Relations with state authorities are not devoid of challenges and difficulties, and negotiations also involved some failures and unmet demands on the part of activists, for example relating to the public park´s design.

While CB developed throughout two ideologically different municipality government mandates, negotiations with the current, more supportive, leftist municipality government show that institutions do have an impact on social innovations´ strengthening and consolidation. Supportive institutions can be crucial in enabling social innovations´ potential to flourish fully, providing the necessary legal framework and financial support through which they can thrive.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

While the mainstream conception of social innovation including the one espoused by the EU Social Innovation Policy sees it as a win-win solution that can ensure both a downsized social spending and an activated civil society which "invites consent and prevents resistance" (Fougère et al., 2017:820), in this article I scrutinized what are some of the conditions and processes that can avoid social innovations turning into the Trojan horse of a rollout neoliberalisation. Through the case study of Can Batlló in Barcelona, this work aimed at investigating how post-crisis urban movements can produce social innovations reacting to the multiple regimes of austerity in a way to foster social change by answering alienated needs, empowering marginalised social groups and enhancing more democratised power relations (Gonzalez et al, 2010). Through the prism

of public service co-production, I looked into the processes at the interface between movements and social innovations that can both reclaim and build new forms of democratised public ownership (Cumbers, 2012; Harvey, 2012).

Rather than consent, this article showed that an important ingredient for a really transformational social innovation is the strength of a social movements able to negotiate from a position of strength, blending (threats of) disruptive repertoires of action with a radical politics of autonomy. In CB, the vitality of social movements represent one determining factor for the oppositional, non-subordinate, autonomous political stance the social innovation was capable to carve in its relationship with state authorities. A movement-backed social innovation can co-produce public services with (financial and legal) support from state institutions, shaping a "communitarian public" good, to put it with CB activists´ words, empowering citizens and local communities that act simultaneously as providers, users and technicians of public services. CB´s autonomous and confrontational position is further enhanced by generating an alternative economy.

Rejecting and breaking the conflation of "public goods" with "state goods", anti-austerity-social innovation can struggle for a democratized public ownership and management, where neighbours and users of the services can intervene, deliberate and decide the planning and delivery of public service, governing them as commons. The collective, cooperative property of these projects, their connection to movements and porous rootedness in the neighbourhood are conducive to a prioritisation of public concerns over short-term, particularistic, and organizational survival interests.

The CB case shows that social innovations may even lessen the vulnerability of "the public" vis-à-vis neoliberalisation processes: while maintaining alive and strengthening movement claims, they can act as a safety cordon against austerity policies. Finally, social innovations can also inspire, influence, and even directly contribute to the design of new innovative social policies on the part of the state, providing knowledge often not accessible to state officials.

While movement-backed social innovations are not by any means the solution to the pervasive effects of welfare state restructuring and neoliberal governance rescaling, and even less to their structural causes, it shows that the combination of different strategies and modalities of action, and the complex but dynamic equilibrium between institutionalisation and autonomy can be highly advantageous for movements´ outcomes. It remains to be seen how far, to what extent and in which ways this fine equilibrium can be maintained and renovated in the evolution of contextual and internal conditions.

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