

# Social movements and social-ecological transformation: from the Indignados movement to Barcelona en Comú

Symposium on  
„Place-based Development –Past and Future“  
In Memoriam Walter B. Stöhr



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# Stöhr & Tödling's work on spatial equity (1978)

- spatial equity and measures of development levels  
→ Dimensions of having, loving and being
- Right of individuals and small groups to determine their immediate natural and human environment
- Selective spatial closure, devolution of some of the decision making powers back to territorially organized horizontal units
- Relating to my work: social-ecological transformation through big contentious political actions, but also micropolitics and imaginaries (social outcomes), and political outcomes

# The Spanish Indignados movement

- Movement of the squares as global cycle of contention (similar repertoire of action & grievances)
- Bursting of real estate bubble, austerity policies, 500,000 evicted families (2007-2011), 47% employment rate amongst youngsters
- Call for demonstration by the “Real Democracy Now” platform on 15 May → encampments in more than 70 Spanish cities’ main squares
- The largest occupations of Spanish squares since the transition to democracy in the 70s, support from over 70% of the wider population



# Decentralization of the movement

- Manifesto of Minimal Demands & Complexification of the structure of commissions
- Removal of the encampments → decentralization & alternatives' creation
- 1-2 years of intense activity in the neighbourhood assemblies. Surge of commoning projects. Convergence with and “learning” from with previous movements
- Struggles in the “mareas”, symbolic “blocking” of Parliaments, international demonstrations, 2 general strikes...



# The prefigurative territories (with G. Kallis)

- Q: how the 15M movement prefigures an alternative order while producing space
- Logics of networks (alterglob) vs. logics of territory (Indignados)
- Autonomous faction's vision: *enacting* change
- **Prefigurative Politics:** Approach to activism & social change that inscribes movement goals into its practices and activities, hence aiming at creating the (vision of) alternative society
  - 3 dimensions:
    - 1) consistence means-ends (strategic)
    - 2) synecdochic or proleptic (enacting the future into the present)
    - 3) construction of alternatives
- Parallel with Lefebvre's evolution of differential spaces into counter-spaces
- **Prefigurative territories:** Movement from first two dimensions to third dimension.
- Opening-up projects to the neighbourhood → conflicts

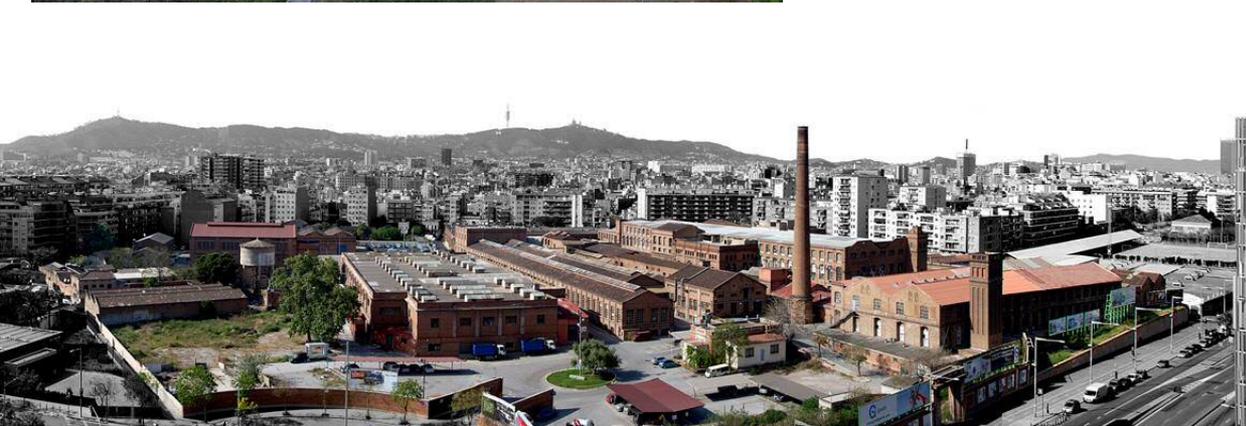
# Plaça Catalunya

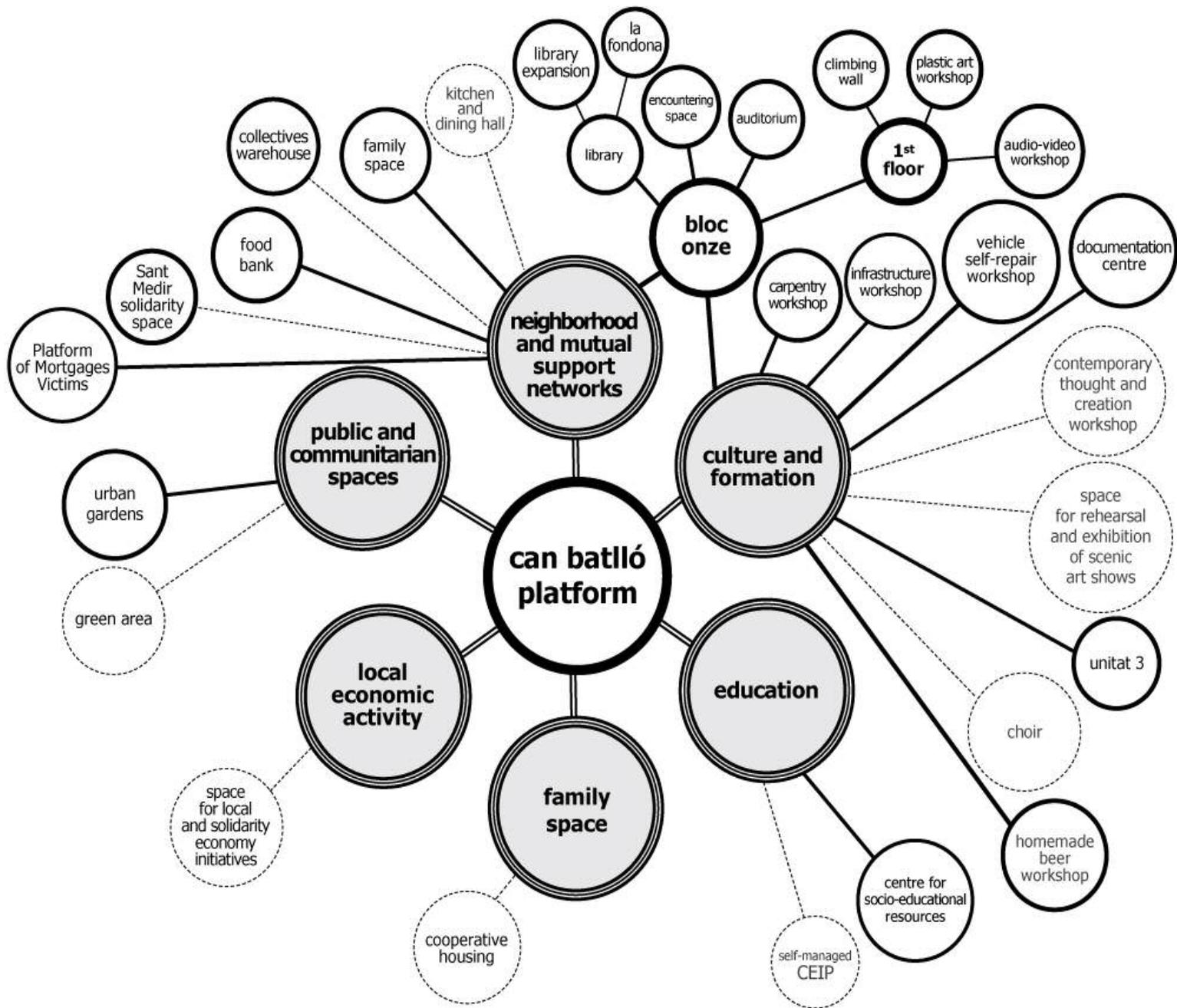
- 1 Economics
- 2 Informatics
- 3 Communication
- 4 Audiovisual Materials
- 5 International Connection
- 6 Health
- 7 Education
- 8 Environment
- 9 Infrastructures
- 10 Alternatives
- 11 Contents
- 12 Collective Kitchen
- 13 Outraged Feminists
- 14 Extension
- 15 Dissemination
- 16 Actions & Activities
- 17 Theatre
- 18 Assemblies Dynamization
- 19 Legal Advising
- 20 Living Together
- 21 Functional Diversity

ENVIRONMENT  
 EDUCATION  
 ECONOMY  
 OUTRAGES FEMINISTS  
 FOOD & CONSUMPTION  
 HEALTH  
 FREE MEDIA  
 MINIMAL DEMANDS DOCUMENT  
 FORMATION S.  
 ELECTORAL LAW  
 ANIMAL RIGHTS,  
 IMMIGRATION  
 DIRECT DEMOCRACY & SELF-MANAGEMENT  
 RESEARCH  
 POLITICAL & CIVIL RIGHTS  
 HOUSING  
 THEORY, DISCOURSE & CONCEPTS  
 CULTURE



# Decentralization after the Square





# What the cases tell us

- From synecdochic-proleptic and means-ends consistency to creation of alternatives
- broader transformational vision, that goes well beyond the bounds of the territory, and is hence strategic
- Demonstration (also through documentation), experimentation & proliferation
- Confluence of movements → richness & tensions/conflicts (“open prefiguration”) and involvement in the neighborhood
- However, different constraints and difficulties to scale up

# Prefiguring radical imaginaries

- (Social) imaginary as ways of understanding and giving meaning to the social world, enabling the (re)production of social institutions, practices and social change (Castoriadis, Taylor, Marcuse, Ricoeur..)
- Haiven & Khasnabish: the ability to imagine the world, life and social institutions not as they are but as they might otherwise be. It is the courage and the intelligence to recognize that the world can and should be changed»
- situated radical imaginaries as *both* embodied and actualised in their social practices and further envisioned into the future

# Imaginaries: Commons

- “a social system at different scales of action within which resources are shared and in which a community defines the terms of the sharing” (De Angelis, 2003), produced through commoning
- integration of production, reproduction, consumption and governance into a single organic unit → work, living and consumption within the territory
- Decision over the distribution of surplus is collective (common funds), taking into account the enhancement of social and environmental benefits
- Social and solidarity economy initiatives politicize the economy and overcome the vision of the economy as separated from the social and the political dimension
- Neighbourhood as expanded political community, “cooperative neighbourhood”
- commons as autonomous spaces from which to reclaim control over the conditions of reproduction, disentangling life from commodity flows, and countering enclosure

# Imaginaries: Autonomy

- Declined in different “shades”: from political (gardens, Recreant Cruilles), to economic-material level and self-determination of needs (self-employment)
- Role of relocalization and territorial control: from politics of place to autonomy towards ‘its economic cycle, its cultural cycle, its invasive determination of how we should live, how we should organize ourselves’
- Principle of autonomy for La Base: *“the capacity to directly determine our way to be in the world (...) organize ourselves from La Base, against state and market forms (...) we should endow ourselves of the necessary structures and material means to do it”*
- The political dimension of autonomy does not mean avoiding engagement with the state: prefigurative practices AND demands on the state with ‘oppositional engagement actions’ (autonomist and pragmatist factions, see Asara, 2016)
- Idea of the commons could contribute to claiming public services, and to a redefinition of what is intended with “public” → “public from the common” through antagonistic position & engagement with the neighbourhood (see also Cumber’s (2012) “public ownership”)
- Yet, detritus spaces left by neoliberalism (neoliberal restructuring, Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Risk of co-optation

# Ecologism/sufficiency

- Tied to commons and autonomy
- Environment as the places and materiality they produce and shape through their living, consuming, producing, working and community building, as the conditions that enable their social reproduction
- Establishing economies of sustainable desire (Barry, 2012) informed and motivated by ecological dysfunction and waste, get involved in collaborative, convivial consumption
- Ecological conception of territory: Restoring economic self-reliance driven by sustainability concerns, and the will to re-embed the economy within local communities and environments (North, 2011; Douthwaite, 1996)

*“That people directly **decide upon the determination of our lives** implies also relocalization, implies (..) **linking with a territory**, be part of that territory, understand it, be familiar with it, setting your roots there. So this implies that the resources that you need for life be close to you and if you depend on your territory it means that **you can take care of it, you can manage it, because in the end when everything comes from far away it is very difficult to see the externalities**, for example of food production” (148:66).*
- The distancing of production from reproduction and consumption → ignoring the conditions of production and their social and environmental cost
  - Transformation of everyday life towards the deployment of the “principle of cooperation and responsibility”

# From social to political outcomes

- Environmentalism within «anti-austerity» movement  
→ Transformative eco-politics plausible only if it is able to articulate such an articulated vision
- Locus of resistance in different spheres, their situated imagination re-imagine and acts in all these sphere
- While local, small-case initiatives, they are social outcomes that have a bearing on political outcomes, sounding board for Barcelona en Comú
- Movement-parties: *„coalitions of political activists who emanate from social movements and try to apply the organization and strategic practice of social movements in the arena of party competition“*  
(Kitschelt, 2006:280)

# Barcelona en Comú

- Articulation of different issues with the spirit of the 15M (housing, distributional issues & anti-austerity, 'real democracy', changes in the socio-economic model)
- **June 2014: 'Guanyem Barcelona'** : citizens' platform aimed "at a real change in the processes of making politics (...) creating new modalities that would allow us to reappropriate institutions in a way that they would be conducive to public good" (Colau)
- **February 2015 : transformed into Barcelona en Comú** (confluence with other leftist parties) Final program built by more than 5000 people. 2015: **won city election**
- Broad participatory processes in the „Municipal Action Program“ and the „District Actuation Programs“ to commonly decide over policies
- Some of the main policies: moratorium on new hotel and touristic license; fining banks for empty homes and the reallocation of some of this empty housing for social rent; pedestrianization, considerable limitation on the use of private vehicle and increase of urban green space; the *Neighbourhood Plan*, allocating 150 million euros to reduce inequalities in the city's neighbourhoods; re-municipalization of water and the building of a municipal renewable energy agency, basic income



# Conclusions

- The indignados in Barcelona is a positive real case example of the transformative role of social movements
- Indignant social outcomes could act as interstitial transformation, political outcomes as ruptural & symbiotic transformation (Wright)
- Role of continuity of movements, local level

# Thank you!

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spiramos  
a fundar  
materialmente,  
sensiblemente,  
la posibilidad de  
**OTRA FORMA DE VIDA**

