

ID 1371 | BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN CRITICAL THEORY AND EMPIRICAL STUDIES: A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF THE URBAN COMMONS

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1 INTRODUCTION

Since the unfolding of industrial capitalism, the institution of the Market, based on the logic of capital accumulation and commodification, has prevailed in the social space through the support of the institution of the State. In reality, the State, on behalf of the Society, should have represented the institution which, through the logic of the Public, based on universalization and social protection, could have balanced and challenged the Market. However, it is evident that the State has not only been an inadequate institution for the protection of the Society, but has also often withdrawn from this role due to a bizarre, complex and intertwined relationship with the Market. The last decades of our history constitute the evidence that the protective role of the State has waned, giving rise to the hegemonic, albeit variegated, neoliberal regime (Peck and al, 2012), whereby the logic of the Market has permeated into the institution of the State. In the face of this reality, that even the latest economic crisis does not seem to have changed, despite the many urban protests which emerged in various parts of the globe and in the wake of the failure of the communist utopia and if the post-politicization of the Left that has finally assumed the same Market logic, the Society seems to be out of alternatives. However, in this apparently catastrophic economic, social and political landscape a new logic has emerged in the contemporary counter-hegemonic discourse: the logic of the Common (Negri; Hardt, 2009; Laval; Dardot, 2014). This logic, based on two main principles, cooperation and self-government, aims to challenge not only the institution of the Market but also the intertwined relationship between the latter and the State in order to put in motion a process of emancipation of the Society from both. The theory of the Common derives from and connects to the theory of the Commons as the principles on which both are based are the same. However, despite their close relationship, it is necessary to separate the two theories, especially in the light of empirical work.

The Common is interpreted as a political strategy of the radical Left, able to articulate the fragmented yet existing antagonist struggles in order to institute the Common. This strategy is based on the claim, the production and the reproduction of the Commons that becomes the means through which the logic of the Common can be expanded. Nevertheless, as some scholars have shown, the critical theory of the Commons lacks an empirical approach (Hurton, 2015), preventing the effective understanding of the emancipatory capacity of these practices, that is to institute the Common. This paper aims to contribute to filling this gap, by setting the analysis in the urban context.

The paper starts by explaining the critical theory of the Common and the Commons, their relation and their differences, underlining the lack of an empirical approach. Secondly, by assuming that within the city, Urban Commons cannot exist in their pure autonomous forms, the paper proposes a comparative methodology based on a relational approach whereby Urban Commons have to be studied in relation to the institution from which they aim to outline emancipatory processes: the Market and the State. By drawing from a case study of Urban Commons analyzed in the city of Barcelona, an industrial factory occupied by a group of artists, the paper sustains that only by unveiling this interface between the Urban Commons and the Market and the Urban Commons and the State it is possible to grasp their complexity and envisage their true emancipatory power, understanding how they are formed and how they are maintained. The paper concludes by reflecting on the emancipatory capacity of the Commons and the tension between the logic of the Common and the logic of the Public.

2 FROM THE COMMON TO THE COMMONS AND VICE VERSA

The critical theories of the Common and the Commons are closely linked since, in both cases, they are based on the organizational principles of cooperation and self-government, and since in both cases they aim to design a path of emancipation of the Society from the institutions of the Market and the State. However, despite seeming like Siamese twins, these two theories are actually two separate bodies which we are required to disjoin, especially in the face of empirical implications. The logic of the Common was presented for the first time in "Commonwealth" by Negri and Hardt (2009) and successively in "Commun. Essai sur la révolution au XXI^e siècle" by Laval and Dardot (2014). Despite the dissimilarities of their approaches, based on the meta-level on the more or less spontaneous operationalization of the concept, and on the micro-level, on a myriad of semantic differentiations, their thesis converges on the objective and the function of the concept of the Common in the political discourse through which all the fragmented, dispersed, yet existing antagonist historic struggles can be articulated. In this sense, their convergence-despite-the-differences, represents the first evidence of the articulation capacity of the concept of the Common. According to their theory, the Common is a political principle (Laval and Dardot, 2014) and a project (Negri and Hardt, 2009) that enables the resistance forces of the Society not to stay in the resistance but to go beyond, through an emancipation (Laval and Dardot, 2014) and liberation (Negri and Hardt, 2009) process capable of producing a rupture with the spatial established order and create an alternative configuration of the space. This alternative configuration can be achieved by questioning, challenging and redefining the space occupied by the institution of the Market and by the State, by instituting (Laval; Dardot, 2014) and constituting (Negri; Hardt, 2009) the Common (Laval; Dardot, 2014). In this perspective the Common is not only a synonym of cooperation and self-government but also it becomes the same objective of the cooperation and self-government (Negri; Hardt, 2009).

The way through which the institution and the constitution of the Common is achieved is the main difference in the two works due to two different epistemological approaches, the one of Negri and Hardt following the Marxist historical materialism tradition and the other of Laval and Dardot following the Proudhonian associationism tradition. However, independently from its operationalization, what the two approaches shared is that the institution and the constitution of the Common takes place in the terrain of the practice. It is on this terrain that the theory of the Common connects with the theory of Commons.

The theory of the Commons developed before the theory of the Common and it could be sustained that the latter is an evolution of the former. The theory of the Commons was developed within the new institutionalist studies with the ground-breaking works of Elinor Ostrom whose merit was to demonstrate that the collective management of different resource systems, both material (1990) and immaterial (2012), not only were possible, but also represented a valuable alternative to the State and the Market. Her contribution had the aim to break that public/private dichotomy that had been so dear to the Western economic-political culture of the twentieth century. Although her work was far from being critical because she never questioned the capitalist mode of production nor the social, economic and spatial injustice produced by it, her contribution was crucial to opening up a new space of economic-political theory in a time when that intertwined relation between the State and the Market became stronger than ever. The space for new critical theorization was occupied by a variety of scholars, starting from the De Angeli (2013) and Caffentzis and Federici (2013) to Harvey (2012) and Mattei (2011, 2013). According to their interpretation, the Commons are constitutive (and institutive) practices of struggle based on the cooperation and self-government that demonstrate that autonomous non-capitalist forms to produce and reproduce life are possible beyond the logic of the State and the Market. In this case, there is no emphasis, as in the case of Ostrom, on the mere collective ability of a community of individuals to self-govern a resource system, but on how the process of collectively self-governing a resource, material or immaterial, is an emancipatory practice that resists and challenges the tension of appropriation and commodification of the Market, but also the tension of absorption and transformation into a bureaucratic and homogenous State form. In this way, the practices of struggle represented by the Commons become a means through which the Common can be instituted and constituted. Concretely speaking, the Commons are built when a social relation (Caffentzis and Federici, 2013; Harvey, 2012; Mattei, 2011; Stavrides, 2015), although unstable and malleable, is built between a self-defined social group and an aspect of its social and physical environment deemed crucial to its life and livelihood (Harvey, 2012). By focusing on the cruciality of the social relation, which is objectified in the struggle, the Commons aim to cast our eyes on the necessity of recovering the ownership of the condition needed for life and its reproduction (De Angeli, 2013) and of re-establishing fundamental rights (Marella, 2012), collectively claiming them back. However, it is very difficult for this relationship to be stable and completely separate from the context, as the Commons coexist with a

myriad of other private and public forms of ownership and governance (Chatterton, 2016). As Stavrides (2015) argues, "we need to abandon the view that fantasies on uncontaminated enclaves of emancipation," also because the emancipation of a single group can no longer be considered emancipation but abounded production and reproduction of social, spatial and economic equalities with the consequent production and reproduction of inequalities outside the boundaries of the group. For this, what characterizes Commons is not only the social relationship between the group and the resource, but also the social relation with other institutions that make it possible for the Commons to be constituted. In other words, the Commons are not only a social relation but a relational social relation since the Commons cannot exist in their pure form.

However, the existence of Commons does not necessarily imply the production of the Common. If the Common is an immanently positive concept in the critical sense of the term, as it was born as a cooperative force opposed to commodification force of the Market, the Commons are not, and for them to be so, they must meet certain conditions. First of all, the relation between the members of the self-defined social group must be as horizontal as possible, as well as its decision-making process (Harvey, 2012). Secondly, the relation between the social group and the resource must imply a non-commodification - off limits of the same resource (Harvey, 2012). And last but not least, the relation with the rest of the Society must be a porous relation, so that the Commons do not become elitist enclaves outside of which social, spatial and economic inequalities are produced and reproduced, but so that they become the means through which a universal emancipation process can happen, by overstepping the boundaries of the self-defined social group (Stavrides, 2015). In other words, despite the great emancipatory potential of the Commons, it is not easy to materialize this emancipation. However, despite the abundance of literature on the critical theory of the Common and the Commons, there is a shortage of literature that empirically investigates the true possibility for the Commons to give form to emancipatory processes, that is, to institute the Common. In other words, the critical theory of the Commons lacks an empirical approach (Hurton, 2015), preventing the effective understanding of its emancipatory capacity. This paper aims to contribute to filling this gap, by setting the analysis in the urban context and by studying within this context the relation of a self-defined social group with a particularly contested resource of the city, which is land.

3 THE URBAN COMMONS

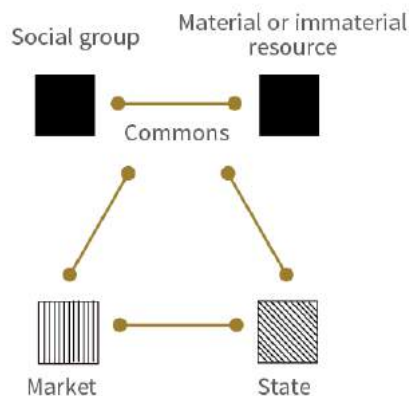
The Commons have become the subject of theoretical speculation by many critical urban scholars who see in the urban space a privileged space for the anti-capitalist struggle (Lefebvre, 1970; Harvey, 2012; Stavrides, 2015; Chatterton, 2016). The continued unbridled urbanization of our globe with the increase in the urban in relation to the rural population, as well as to the strong politicization of urban space, mainly due to the great manifestations and occupations that urban social movements developed in this context, has led to a growing academic interest in the urban. Starting from Lefebvre (1970), who was the first to reflect on the urbanization of the world and to argue that the revolution would have been urban or would not have been, to Harvey (2012), who sustains that reclaiming and organizing the city for anti-capitalist struggle is a great place to start, many authors have been struck by the fascination of the urban and its revolutionary potential. However, beyond the fascination, the emergence of the urban is also due to the change of capitalist production in the Western world. As sustained by Negri and Hardt (2009), if during industrial capitalism, the factory was the privileged space for class struggle, being the place of production, of the encounter of workers and of their rebellion, now this privilege can no longer be attributed to this space. The current change in the capitalist mode of production has transcended the factory to invade all the urban territory and so has the struggle. For this reason, they argue that the metropolis is for the multitude what the factory was for the working class. In other words, the urban space is considered to be a privileged space for anti-capitalist struggle where the Commons can become an instrument of this struggle. However, if cities offer a privileged ground for the claiming, production and reproduction of the Commons, they also represent a hostile ground.

Cities, and the production of space, have always played a key role in the capital accumulation process (Lefebvre, 1970; Harvey, 2012). Cities embody the essence of capitalist production on which a major part of the same production is based, through urban expansion and speculative land-use. In many of his works, Harvey has given evidence for the crucial role cities have played in the uneven development of capitalism, underlining the relation between capitalism, wealth and urban expansion as in the case of the United States' golden age as well as the one China is now undergoing. Moreover, he provided evidence of how the city has been crucial for the rescue of capitalism itself during its many surplus-based crises, with the absorption

of surplus production into the urban development. The crucial role of cities in capitalist history is also maintained and legally legitimized by a series of regulatory devices, primarily the modern urban planning (Tafuri, 2007), supported by the institution of the State. In other words, cities are a socially constructed environment shaped to favour the action of the Market with a broad support of the State. From this it follows that cities, being privileged spaces of capital accumulation, enshrine that constant tension to the commodification of resources that the market needs. This is particularly true in relation to one of the most valuable resource that cities have, which is land. In this saturated space of both capital investments and people (Hurton, 2015) every single space of the city enters the competitive logic of capitalism, where there is an over-competition and an over-pressure to the use of the space. This is the reason why, the claim, the production and the reproduction of the Commons in the urban environment, especially if one of the resources in question is land, could be a much more hostile process. However, the hostility must not become a deterrent to the study of the Commons in the urban context. Studying their claiming, production and reproduction in this capital-shaped and hostile space is essential to understand the conditions and the limits of the Urban Commons to be truly emancipatory practices.

4 A METHODOLOGY FOR THE URBAN COMMONS

As we have seen, the critical theory of the Commons and the Urban Commons is supported by abundant literature. All of the literature places great emphasis on the emancipatory capacity of the Commons, but it is difficult to find empirical studies that materially respond to this emancipation, firstly because there are still few empirical contributions being made, and secondly because they start from specific research objectives: some research has been dedicated to the qualification of the Urban Commons (Hurton, 2015), some research focuses on defining limits and challenges (Bresnahan and Byrne, 2015) and some research studies the organization of resistance (Bunce, 2016). The result is that the shortage and fragmentation of the empirical contribution is still not able to substantially back-feed the theoretical contribution. The aim of this paper is to try to bridge the gap between critical theory and empirical study by proposing an empirical approach to the study of the Urban Commons that can help in the construction of an empirically-based theory of their emancipatory capacity, that is to say on their capacity to institute the Commons. This empirical approach stems from the same ontology of the Commons, that is their relational nature. This nature is even more evident in the urban context where economic and demographic saturation and over-pressure and over-competition on a strongly State-regulated space make it impossible for Commons to exist in their pure



form. For this reason, the empirical approach that this research proposes is a relational approach to the study of the Urban Commons, whereby the object of the study becomes the nature of the relation between a self-defined group and a social or physical resource and the nature of the relation between the former relation and the main institutions that dominate the social space, which are the State and the Market, that are also the same institutions from which they aim to emancipate from.

Figure 1: The relational approach to the study of the Urban Commons

Normally, the relational nature of the Commons is a fact that emerges as a result of empirical works, when the type of alliances a Commons builds to sustain its survival or its partial institutionalization through the integration into public programmes are finally shown (Hurton, 2015; Bresnahan and Byrne, 2015; Bunce, 2016). However, what is argued here, also confirmed by the work of Chatterton (2016), is that in order to understand the process of emancipation of the Commons, their relational nature, and therefore their non-pure-self-governing-form, can not simply be the result of an inductive work but must be deductively considered as a postulate of the research itself and as a guide for the entire empirical work. In order to show this methodology, this paper uses the case of an artists' self-governed space that developed in postindustrial Barcelona in the late 1990s. The relational approach is firstly used to define through which

web of social relations the Urban Commons takes shape and to what extent this web is capable of producing the Common; and secondly to analyze what the threats and the limitations of these relations are and whether they could be maintained over time.

5 THE CASE OF THE ESCOCESA ARTS FACTORY

THE URBAN COMMONS

The Escocesa Urban Commons is the expression of a social relation established between a group of artists and a privately owned industrial warehouse of 7500 square meters, called the Escocesa, located in the Pere IV street of the Poble Nou, the former industrial district of Barcelona. The industry in place since 1885, officially terminated its operations in 1998. After one year, the factory began to be rented by creative professionals. At the beginning, they were around 12-13 artists. Generally, the relation built between the owner and artists was based mainly on mutual advantage. Artists could benefit from affordable renting prices of wide industrial spaces in a rather central area of the city and the owner could benefit from a low but constant profit in a time when these spaces were otherwise unprofitable. As time passed the number of artists grew steadily. By the end of 2006 there were around 75 artists among which were painters, sculptors, photographers, circus performers, etc. During this period, the Escocesa was self-governed and self-sufficient. Self-government was rather elementary, as artists had to share little, mainly the bills, and only few decisions had to be taken together, principally concerning the realization of shared arts events within the Escocesa and shared events with other arts spaces of the neighbourhood. Self-sufficiency must be understood in the sense that the artists' social group of the Escocesa was not receiving any type of public funding as a group and each artist was paying the rent separately. This means that, the economic sufficiency differed from case to case, with some artists who were more and some who were less economically self-sufficient.

However, the Escocesa was not an isolated case. In those years, the Poble Nou, suffering the decline of industrial activities, was an undervalued area due to the financial disinvestment by banks and real estate developers and the laissez-faire approach of institutional power. This is why, from the 1970s onwards many artists' groups settled in the area, using the former industrial factories as work spaces. During that period, in which no other social group and no other economic and institutional actors were interested in these properties, artists represented the only ones. As a result, the artists' concentration in the Poble Nou grew to the point where it was identified in the literature as an unplanned creative milieu (Martí-Costa and Pradel, 2011) as many others taking place in former industrial districts in western cities (Zukin and Braslow, 2011). There aren't any institutional statistics available, but according to artists' associations (CVAA, 2007) by the end of 2006 in the Poble Nou there were 232 artists and 12770 sqm of studios spaces. The Escocesa and the Poble Nou creative milieu grew without any institutional planning, but only through the relation between the artists' need for affordable spaces, on the one hand, and landlords' profitability on the other.

The relation that all of the artists had with the Escocesa warehouse was based mainly on economic interest. Artists needed a space to work which had some specific characteristics, such as wide-open areas, an abundance of natural light, affordable renting prices and proximity to the city center, and the industrial site of the Escocesa met all them. Obviously, for young, unsalable and low-income artists the relation of economic interest was a relation of necessity since without access to affordable spaces, they could no longer afford to carry out their arts activities. Nevertheless, in addition to the economic reason, some artists also began to develop an identity relation with the Escocesa and the Poble Nou creative milieu, since it made them feel as they were an integrated part of that neighborhood. This is why the Escocesa Urban Commons can not be considered separate from the unplanned creative milieu of Poble Nou as it was precisely because of this dense network of self-governed arts spaces that the Common was produced.

THE COMMON

The Common referenced in this case is the democratic, diverse and decommodified arts production, autonomous from market and political pressures. In the case of the Escocesa and of the Poble Nou creative milieu, the democratic, diverse and decommodified arts production was due to the affordable access to space. If generally only those who can afford the uncertain economic stability of this

discipline can attempt this professional path, in this case young, unsalable and low-income artists could also find a workplace in the Escocesa, or in other arts spaces, and produce art. In this way, artists were keeping their creativity free, without feeling the pressure to highly commodify their arts or to fully meet the need of the art market or to be constantly in search of public funding, maintaining a sort of collective independence from public patronage. Nevertheless, despite the fact that affordable access to space was helping to democratize, diversify and de-commodify art production, and to maintain artists' creative freedom, the democratization, diversification and de-commodification could only be partial, since it couldn't guarantee access to space to all of those more than young, low-income and unsalable artists. This is why, it would have been ideal to compensate the production of the Common with a production of the Public, whereby the universal logic, by providing access to affordable space to those more than young, low-income and unsalable artists, could have reduce the imperfection of the logic of the Common.

THE THREAT

The Barcelona City Council, governed in those times by the left-wing Catalonia Socialist Party, played a leading role in the land revalorization process of the Poblenou through the implementation of a pro-growth land-use reform based on the notion of the knowledge city - the 22@ Plan approved in 2000. The 22@ aimed to transform almost two-hundred hectares of the old industrial area of Poblenou, into a knowledge area, mainly ICT-driven, with the mixed uses of housing, economic activities and social facilities. In order to achieve these goals, the 22@ Plan used the Barcelona model, but with a more market-oriented approach. Thus, if, on the one hand, for each 100 sqm of private redevelopment, the public administration retained 31 sqm of the land, of which 18 sqm was to be dedicated to green zones and 10% in public facilities, on the other hand, it increased the construction rate from 2 sqm/sqm to 3 sqm/sqm without limiting the height of buildings. Furthermore, if on the one hand, the plan provides 100% of some sort of social housing of which 25% was to be rented, on the other hand, it also allowed for the reconversion of factories into lofts to be sold on the market at market prices. However, although knowledge (and thus culture) was the driving principle behind the transformation, the presence of the unplanned creative milieu was not taken into account when the plan was drafted. The Urban Planning Department considered the Poblenou merely as an area characterized by a "functional obsolescence" (Barcelona City Council, 2010). In the Plan, the many vacant factories, together with those ones occupied by artists, were only considered to be disused architectural artefacts, symbols of the economic downturn where all artists' social groups were not considered productive agents, but rather only a further demonstration of the economic obsolescence.

With the approval of the 22@ Plan many redevelopment projects began and land value increased (Martí-Costa and Pradel, 2011). Many artists' workshop started to come under threat and disappeared, progressively moving somewhere else, mainly towards another undervalued former industrial area: the Hospitalet de Llobregat. A few years after the Plan's approval, the Escocesa also became threatened. At the end of 2005 the factory was bought by Renta Corporación S.A, a Spanish real estate company. The plan they have for the Escocesa was to redevelop the factory, reforming the existing housing along the Pere IV street, converting the rest into lofts and handing over the remaining 30% (two warehouses) to the City Council for public facilities, as established by the 22@ Plan. The Escocesa redevelopment was approved and made public in March 2007. As soon as Renta Corporación S.A. bought the factory, it started to offer economic compensation to artists to facilitate their departure. Since each contract was subject to a specific negotiation, many of them accepted the indemnification and moved somewhere else. Only a reduced number of artists decided to remain until the end of their contracts refusing the compensation and campaigning against the redevelopment project.

THE STRUGGLE

Artists who decided to stay and to struggle in the Escocesa were few, around 15 people. This group was formed mainly by those young, unsalable and low-income artists who couldn't afford to pay higher rent for a studio space and by those more or less affluent ones who had developed a strong identity relation with the space. Thus, in order to facilitate institutional negotiation, they gather into the Emma Ideas Association (EMA). When the Escocesa redevelopment project was made public, the EMA association presented a project to the ICUB, the Cultural Institute of Barcelona, in order to take advantage of the possible transfer of facilities space to the City Council. They proposed that the Escocesa become a not-for-profit cultural center

managed by the EMA Association to experiment, produce and spread fine plastic arts, where self-sufficiency would be provided by the members' fees and by the renting out of some studio spaces (EMA, 2007). Eventually, the EMA association managed to remain in the factory, saved thanks to the intervention of the City Council which acquired the two warehouses and included them in the Arts Factories Programme. However, most of the self-governed arts centers under threat didn't benefit from the same institutional help and disappeared from the Poble Nou.

THE PUBLIC LOGIC TO SAVE THE COMMON

The objective of the Arts Factory Programme (AFP) was to support existing and new creative activities by retaining affordable spaces in Barcelona for artists and creative professionals through the provision of a network of public arts factories with different artistic specializations, assigning to arts companies or association or groups the management of these spaces. The Programme was part of the new Strategic Cultural Plan of 2006 that represented a shift in the cultural policy approach of the Barcelona City Council and the ICUB from an entrepreneurial towards a more democratic understanding of culture. In the words of a public officer who contributed to its drafting, the new Plan looked at culture "not as a commodity to foster economic development, but as a right, stating that everyone can benefit independently from its possible commodification and from its status". Through the AFP programme, it seemed that public institutions had understood how the provision of affordable spaces was relevant to guaranteeing a fully democratic, diverse and de-commodified artistic production. Spaces included in the network had to follow four main principles. Firstly, they had to be in the public interest. This means that the artists' accessibility had to be guaranteed by an open and transparent selection process allowing the rotation of artists. Secondly, they had to pursue cultural and artistic interests, giving spaces over to experimentation and innovation, while also sustaining artistic excellence. Thirdly, they had to develop a territorial dimension, forming a relationship with the neighbourhood and offering cultural services to promote social cohesion. Lastly, they had to become spaces for technological innovation in the creative sector. Moreover, all factories, by being included in the network would have to be publicly funded, so that the economic sustainability of each factory would not be a crucial dimension, but had to be assessed on a case by case basis according to the management system of each space (Barcelona City Council, 2007).

The first stage of the plan was characterized by the researching of public industrial buildings across the entire Barcelona area that could be incorporated into the network. The Escocesa factory resulted in the first selection, but surprisingly it wasn't considered for its existing creative activity, but only as an industrial artifact that met architectural requirements (Barcelona City Council, 2007). During this first phase, another six factories were included into the programme: Fabra i Coats, La Central del Circ, Hangar, La Seca, El Graner and Ateneu Popular de Nou Barris, of which only Hangar was a former Poble Nou arts center. Some factories were long-standing self-managed arts spaces, so they were allowed to remain being managed by the same associations, while other factories were entrusted to different organizations, each one representative of a specific artistic sector. The second phase of the AFP involved the architectural renovation of all factories. Once the renovation was about to be terminated, each factory could finally become part of the network and start to receive public funding in order to become a fully functioning Arts Factory.

THE ESCOCESA URBAN COMMONS WITHIN THE PUBLIC LOGIC

According to the 22@ Plan regulation, the 1st of January of 2008, two warehouses of the Escocesa estate were transferred by Renta Corporación S.A. to the ICUB to be used as public arts facilities. However, as the ICUB did not yet have a clear idea of the type of artistic specialization which the two buildings could accommodate, and since it wasn't aware of any other arts associations to entrust them to, it decided to take advantage of the presence of the EMA association by welcoming their claim to manage the building. The same month, one of the two warehouses was temporarily entrusted to the EMA association. The other warehouse, the function of which had yet to be identified, remained in the hands of the ICUB. The rest of the estate was still in the hands of Renta Corporación S.A. which had however temporarily stopped the redevelopment project due to the crisis. According to public officers, the temporary entrustment was due to the fact that Escocesa was not recognized as a long-standing self-managed creative space, as in

the case of Ateneu de Nou Barris and Hangar because the EMA association wasn't an association with a long-standing tradition of social and/or cultural activism and it couldn't rely on a well-structured arts project.

The contract signed between the ICUB and the EMA association established that one of the two warehouses could be managed by the association until the renovation project of the building had taken place. From that moment on, the arts project of the Escocesa factory had to be re-discussed and a public call had to be done to assign the management of the arts project. This didn't prevent the EMA association from presenting itself and winning the call. However, in the event that the EMA had won, the association members would have to leave after two years in order to provide a complete rotation of its artists, for the sake of the public, the cultural and the artistic interest, guaranteeing its open accessibility and use. Thus the ICUB temporarily saved the social relation of Escocesa' artists with the factory, not because it recognized the relation of interest and identity of artists with the space, but only because of a temporary lack of planning that should have soon been overcome. However, the temporary status of the Escocesa factory never ended and became structural.

In 2010 refurbishment works began in all the factories. The Escocesa was the only one in which the refurbishment works didn't begin. The reasons given by public officers were that in those years of economic crisis, in which the municipal budget shrank in all areas, the AFP didn't have enough resources to carry out all of the works. Thus, it had to prioritize some projects and on this list of priorities, the Escocesa was the last one. However, a small amount of funding was allocated in a timely manner to secure the building, as it was already operating as a sort of public arts center, albeit imperfectly. In those times the Escocesa, became a not-for-profit arts center self-managed by the EMA association, organizing a variety of public arts and training activities and offering access to some of their studio space for temporary artists through public calls in order to economically sustain the project.

As soon as the refurbishment works were completed, all of the other factories were incorporated into the programme as fully functioning Art Factories and they began to receive a constant public subsidy. Thus the Escocesa was the only factory that, since it didn't undergo the refurbishment works shouldn't have been entitled to funds, since it couldn't be considered a fully fledged Art Factory. However, the Escocesa was part of the programme and it was functioning as a sort of imperfect public arts centre. Thus, in order not to leave the Escocesa in a particularly disadvantaged position the ICUB decided to transform the timely allocation into an annually-renewed contribution. In the beginning, the amount of the contribution was small, around 4000-5000 Euros, but it progressively increased over the following years. However, the funds were much lower in comparison to other factories. This precarious condition created by the postponement of refurbishment works and the reduced amount of public funds has characterized the Escocesa up to recent times.

THE EFFECTS OF THE PUBLIC LOGIC ON THE ESCOCESA URBAN COMMONS

Being part of the AFP and being a publicly-funded, albeit imperfect, arts centre implied progressive structural changes in the Escocesa. Firstly, the relationship between the Escocesa and ICUB changed. The latter, in order to justify its inclusion in the programme and the direct investment of public money began to be more demanding towards Escocesa especially in relation to its compliance towards public and cultural interests. Two of the demands were the most pressing: the realization of as many public activities as possible and the rotation of as many artists as possible, reducing the number of permanent artists in order to guarantee an open access of the centre to creative professionals. Secondly, the internal management changed. Artists involved in the management of the Escocesa, especially the president of the EMA association, were no longer able to carry out his/her art project. The management entailed such an amount of work that it could not be carried out during an artist's free time, but rather required a person to be contracted full-time. Thus, at the end of 2011, the association decided to hire a manager through a public call, dedicating a part of its budget to this new administrative role. Despite the fact that the manager was appointed by the same EMA association he was seen as a sort of representative of the public institution, since he strongly pushed for the Escocesa to satisfy the public and cultural interests. From 2011 onwards, the AFP was marked by a major cultural policy change. In this year municipal elections were won for the first time in Barcelona, by a conservative party, Convergence and Union. The new government set a new cultural agenda, also effecting the AFP design. The new guideline for the programme represented a shift towards a market-oriented cultural approach, whereby the Arts Factories had to be frontline arts centers in order to contribute to the city's cultural internationalization and professionalization (ICUB Report,

2011). In relation to the Escocesa, the ICUB became less tolerant of its precarious conditions because they did not allow the factory to achieve the new objectives. However, as the ICUB could not stand away the EMA until the renovation works had been done, while not having any intention of actually carrying them out, it began to put the artists under pressure, pushing for an internal collapse of the Escocesa by underfunding the project while over-demanding results.

During these years, public funds increased, reaching around 40.000 euros from 2013 onwards. Nevertheless, this contribution was still the lowest in comparison with other factories. This situation made all of Escocesa's artists feel discriminated against by the public administration and always in competition for funds with other factories. The underfunding also caused many social tensions among the same Escocesa artists. Since a part of the resources could finance art projects of both permanent and temporary residents, the result was that especially young, unsalable and low-income artists, for whom a little contribution meant a lot, were struggling for an extremely limited budget. Moreover, the underfunding also increased the tension among artists and workers. In order to be positively evaluated by the AFP and to receive more funds, the Escocesa had to maintain a high level of performance, but with inadequate resources, relying on the overworking and the exploitation of both artists and the manager. In reality the reasons for all of these tensions are rooted in the protraction of the precarious condition created by the postponement of refurbishment works and the integration of the Escocesa into the AFP as an imperfect arts factory.

Due to the lack of realization of the works, the artists were paying the for the effects of a non-compliance of the ICUB, which was implicitly recognized by the ICUB since the underfunding can be interpreted as an admission of non-compliance. This was also the reason why the relation of the permanent artists with the space changed. Since there was no prospect for the works to be carried out, the temporary privilege of permanent artists that were retaining a studio space far below the market standards was becoming more and more a consolidated privilege. This is why, no movement was developed among artists to press the ICUB to start the renovation works. Retaining the affordable studio space in such a central location of the city and benefitting from the public funds for their art projects was an extremely advantageous situation that none of the artists sought to change. The attempt to protect the privilege on spatial resource of permanent artists along with the tension in the struggle for the monetary resources among all artists caused the collapse of the Escocesa as it had been expected by the ICUB.

In September 2016, the artists of Escocesa decided to fire the manager. This decision was officially taken after a majority vote of the Assembly but it was heavily pushed for by a group of permanent artists, who saw him as a threat to their privilege on the space. The dismissal of the manager can be seen as the last desperate attempt by some artists to maintain their affordable studio space, by stopping the transformation of the Escocesa into a fully Arts Factory. However, this operation, far from achieving its objective, contributed to worsening the tension among artists and to legitimizing the ICUB's view of the factory, which played a leading role in its future transformation. At the moment, the Escocesa is in a transition period where the assembly presidency has changed, handed over to one of the artists who had good relations with the ICUB and in which the latter, despite its non-compliance, is leading a progressive transformation of the Escocesa to becoming a fully frontline Arts Factory: with many public arts activities and with the rotation of all of its artists. Being public property, and given the fact that the AFP was a consolidated programme of the ICUB, the artists no longer had any legitimacy to maintain their relations with space, especially in the re-valued, saturated space of the Poblenu.

DISCUSSION

Before the Escocesa became part of the AFP, it could be considered an Urban Commons as it was rather self-sufficient and self-governed. Moreover, the Escocesa, together with other creative factories of the Poblenu creative milieu, was contributing to producing the Common, that is, a more diverse, democratic and de-commodified arts production, free from market and political imperatives although the diversity, democratization and de-commodification were only partial because it could exclude all those more than unsalable, young and low-income artists. In this sense the logic of the Public could have compensated the logic of the Common, reducing its imperfection. However, the existence of the Escocesa Urban Commons and the Poblenu creative milieu depended on the City Council and private sector's lack of interests and investments in the area that undervalued land prices. Once the City Council and private sector's interest and investments increased, highly planned by the 22@, the days of both the Escocesa and the

Poblenou creative milieu were numbered. The result was that the autonomous creative factories disappeared from the Poblenou and moved to other under-valued postindustrial areas, such as the Hospitalet de Llobregat, where the same type of Urban Commons can currently be found and the same type of Common is produced. The Escocesa Urban Commons was saved only thanks to the intervention of the ICUB. The public ownership was the only guarantee to save the Escocesa at the cost of its inclusion in the Arts Factory Programme.

This AFP programme was born with the intention of producing, protecting and compensating the imperfection of the Common produced by the Escocesa and the Poblenou creative milieu, through the logic of the Public, by universally providing affordable creative spaces to arts professionals. However, in its operationalization it was neither able to produce and protect nor to compensate the imperfection of the Common. The ICUB didn't protect the Poblenou creative milieu and it saved the Escocesa only because of a lack of planning. The emergence of autonomous creative factories and the production of the same type of Common moved to more marginal areas and Escocesa could not be considered an Urban Commons anymore, since its management and sufficiency was no longer autonomous from state power and it was no longer producing the Common. Under the Public logic, the diverse, democratic and de-commodified arts production of the Escocesa and the Poblenou creative milieu had been distorted, confined within a spectrum of arts excellence and market imperatives. In other words, the AFP became the expression of the intertwined relation between the State and the Market, where the intervention of the State, despite with the logic of the Public should have protected, produced and compensated the imperfection of the Common was not able to do so. The current state of the Escocesa is the materialization of the degeneration of the conflictual relation between the Common and the Public. Certainly, the Public logic in the name of universality must guarantee open and democratic access to all. In this respect, the defense of the interest of permanent artists on the space represented the defense of the interest of a particular collective on a universal space. However, it is also the last desperate attempt of a group to defend that crucial social relation with the space and the memory of the production of the Common once possible, against the total disruption by State intervention and Market forces despite, in this case, the defense of the Common meant the closure of the group inside on its own privilege, inside the Urban Commons.

6 CONCLUSION

Surely the Commons can be a means to institute and constitute the Common. However, the theory of the Commons lacks an empirical approach that allows evaluating their emancipatory capacity. This paper aimed to bridge this gap by proposing a relational approach to the study of the Commons that reflects their relational nature. This methodology is applied to the analysis of a case study of Commons in the urban space of Barcelona. Through this approach is possible 1) to build the network of relations that made possible the Urban Commons; 2) to understand if the Urban Commons was producing the Common; 3) to analyse how a change in these relations impacts the Urban Commons and its emancipatory capacity. From the analysis of the case-study it emerged that the Urban Commons and the Common need the intervention of the State and the logic of the Public. The former because, under the pressure of the saturated space of the city, public property becomes the only salvation; and the latter because, the Urban Commons was producing an imperfect Common that needed to be compensated by the logic of the Public in order to guarantee universality and democratization. However, the intervention of the State, with the logic of the Public permeated by the logic of the Market, has led to a deterioration of both the Urban Commons and the Common, which can no longer be regarded as such. The paper concludes sustaining that the emancipatory capacity of the Urban Commons cannot rely only on the logic of the Common but needs also the logic of the Public. However, the latter, highly permeated by the logic of the Market, instead of protecting, producing and compensating the logic of the Common produced by the Urban Commons, often limits its emancipatory capacity.

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ID 1379 | CHALLENGING PERIPHERALITY THROUGH ACCESS TO THE INTERNET? SOCIO-SPATIAL PRACTICES OF THE CONNECTED RURBAN

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1 ACCESS TO THE INTERNET IN MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES: THE RURBAN STANCE

Specially in the last two decades, the widespread of the internet has had profound impacts on howspace is organised and experienced, reinforcing the importance of Information and CommunicationTechnologies (ICTs) in its production. While enough attention is being paid to our cities, limited studies onthe impact of internet on the countryside reflect a neglect of specific demands and needs of the ruralpopulation, with the risk that the rural continues to play catch-up with the urban (Craig and Greenhill, 2005).