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## **ID 1720 | DEMOCRATIC PLATAFORMS: FROM MUNICIPALIST APPROACH TO DEMO-CRATIC SPATIAL AGENCIES**

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### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Since 2008 financial and economical melt down that became a democratic and political crisis with repercussions all over the world due liberal management attempt to profit in a general crisis landscape, a new political context has reemerged. In Spain, for example, the reappearance of the Municipalist Movement due the 15M experience in Madrid's occupied square remembered the municipalist Spanish heritage of the XIXth century, for example (Cf. OBSERVATORIO METROPOLITANO, 2014, CAVA, BELTRAN, 2015). In this 2008 context, new forms of experience politics and this return to the political emerged and are emerging in a world where virtual platforms are a media that is central to this insurreccional and social movements. The use of twitter and other social media platforms gained centrality to the democratic debate because real time is a possibility that was never envision in democratic processes. New forms of cartography processes with the help of internet allowed new visibilities to emerge, new people to appear and new forms of struggle to be (re)invented.

The use of a social media network (from twitter to crowdmaps) to organize the movement was the first step. Since the protests have a local and temporary effect, the next challenge was how to take such energy and knowledge and transfer it to a possibility of domination of politics, i.e., the state. The question appear as how to use the social media apparatus to mobilize a take over of the state, of political representations in order to exercise direct democracy in everyday life space.

Since 2015 cities elections in Spain and victories in Barcelona, Madrid and other cities, these municipalist movements are beginning to aim the potentiality of these media through the creation of their own virtual platforms. Creating sites that amplifies the voices of groups and people and mapping the city regarding the impacts of public policies, such platforms are experiments of make visible public policies, the people's power and help them to consider the state as a partner as well.

This presentation intends to discuss these virtual democratic plataforms build by the spanish cities administrations, in special Barcelona. Having as a critic parameter the idea of democracy and its paradox as portrayed by political scientist Chantal Mouffe, and Jacques Ranciere critique of Democracy as well, opposing it to the term demo-cracy (power to the demo, i.e., the people), the present text aims to point out the spatial limits of the plataforms in order to achieve power to intervene in planning operations in the city with or without the state.

## 2 POLITICS, POLITICAL AND 2008

The political scientist Chantal Mouffe in her book *The Democratic Paradox* analyses the main problem regarding modern democracies that is related to its lack (intentional or not) of understanding of what it means democracy, its modes of expression and exercise on the territory and its relation to politics.

To her, politics "(...) would be characterized by a set of practices and discourses that seek, on an institutional level, to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence"(MOUFFE 2005). So, politics is directly related to the idea of hegemony, a key concept created by Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci and brought back to the center of discussion by her and Ernesto Laclau. Politics is the intense dispute over the hegemony of a certain political, social, economical and cultural status quo. Politics is related to preserve or change the state of things using the institutions of the State itself like schools, universities, cultural centers, media and others organizations that produce a unitary image of the nation, of people.

On the other hand, when Mouffe discusses the political, the subject is no longer how to maintain a certain design of relations and a certain organization, but how to disrupt them and create new forms of democracy, redimensioning even the central role of State. The political is a disruptive force that can be a creative one when used to think how to achieve another state of things.

In the financial and political crisis that emerged in 2008, politics and the political emerged and make extremely visible in bodies and streets such democratic paradox, turning it into a contradiction. Representation and direct action became two forces that collided on streets and institutions. Representants became simbols of a decaying form of politics, the place of the State as the only public or collective oriented institution was put in check due the emergence of social movements and associations that represented more thast the state itself.

The protests that irrupt in that financial crisis context are the emergence of the political and its objective is simply to destroy the usual manners of how politics are made through negotiations that are invisible to the majority of people and by representatives that represents no one, having as objective the profit of some despite the poor conditions of the many. Putting in the edge the idea of representation that modern and western democracy took for granted in a very specific manner during Modernity, associating it to freedom, was the first step to the political.

After the protests that begun 2008, what became more necessary was to rethink how this deconstitutional power of the streets could be turned to a constitutional one, in streets or in representatives spaces. But it does not mean to stop to occupy streets and representatives spaces as public squares and public buildings as Spanish social movements did. It means that from that moment on, it was necessary to dispute politics by inserting the political in it. And in Spain, among many others countries in Europe like Greece, it happened.

## 3 THE SPANISH CONTEXT

During XIXth century, when Spain was not a nation but a project of a unified nation, there were various attempts to transform a set of cities and municipalities into a country, a state nation. Against the municipalism, a project of nation. What is interesting to point out is that such nationalist project found political and local barriers to come to existence: every time that such unity was proposed, autonomous cities defy such objective in order to maintains its autonomous and decentralized mode of operate and live. Insurrections happened in the cities against attempts to build a nation; federalists pacts were made in order to give an alternative to the nation project. The communist spectrum in 1848 had as consequences in spain the formation of revolutionaries groups; independence uprisings were made due a class struggle in the 1870's (OBSERVATORIO METROPOLITANO, 2015). Such history regarding autonomy, class struggle and decentralized organization is a memory lived in cities, in neighborhoods, in autonomous and local movements, it is a municipalist spectrum. Before the attempt to erase such past of struggles against the nation ideology known as Spanish civil war, the country nowadays known as Spain tried to invent other forms of political and economical organizations and that is a memory that arise in 2008: more autonomy regarding the planning and management of the city and the country.

The Spanish State response to the 2008 financial meltdown that occurred first in USA and then, in the rest of the world, was more austerity. Regardless the people's desire to changes in the economic system, what the government did was maintain the current status quo: the profit to banks and the loss of homes to middle class citizens. So, the demand get inflated and became a desire to a change in the political system. "They do not represent us" became a slogan in streets. In may 15th of 2011, camping in Puerta del Sol square, Spanish protested against politics through the political (CAVA, BELTRAN, 2015). Echoes from the insurrections and street occupy in XIXth century municipalism were heard.

After this disruptive force that emerged in public spaces in other cities in Spanish, many hackers recognized the necessity to go beyond what was proposed by occupiers. Despite the fact that through social network – facebook and twitter – many were called and participate of the occupation – from young ones to the older – and a long list of reinvidications were made, what was new in that moment was the perception that the revolution must be networked too. A protest called by the digital platform Democracia Real ya, The 15M or Indignados, produced a possibility of rethink social media not a global network of control and surveillance, but a kind more potent regarding democracy. From 15M to Ganemos – a successful attempt to take the energy and organizations that promoted the 15M and transform it in a politic movement – and then, to Barcelona en Comú and Ahora Madrid was a gigantic step and a certain one.

The history of that process is not the main objective of this paper, but what meant to pass from a popular and direct structure to a representative one, that happened after Ada Colau and Manuela Carmena were elected as Alcade of Barcelona and Madrid. The French philosopher Jacques Rancière in his book dedicated to democracy entitled Hatred of Democracy (2006) discuss the model of democracy created in Greek society. The etymology of the word democracy is "government – cracy" of the "demon – people". So, democracy was born by the desire of give freedom to the people and not to the elected by the people. The election is a lottery process which anyone can be chosen to be elected. That kind of voting mechanism had the objective to keep politics an activity performed by non-professionals, which it guaranteed that the elected would do what people command and not what they think is the best.

Despite this lottery methodology, what is at stake in demo-cracy is the possibility of the people rule the society through public assemblies and encounters. It is a democracy that is based in a very short institutional distance between the people and their representantive and the fact that the very own democratic exercise is made not just by representation, but by direct action either. This is the democratic paradox that Belgian writer Chantal Mouffe discussed in his book cited before. Democracy is not a contradiction which direct action or representation has to be erased from the formula. Democracy is a paradox because that contradiction is lived and the relationship between protests on streets and the necessity of occupy by agreements and arrangements prove that.

So, returning to the democratic platform and the virtual spaces created, once 15M unfold itself into a movement that arrived at the Town Hall of several Spanish cities, the Democracia Real Ya model had to be rediscussed. Even better, it had to be reimagined in a context where direct democracy was not status quo. And regarding urban planning, that is the democracy in an everyday life sphere, virtual platforms had to be consider more that just make visible protests and demands, but articulations of that democratic paradox through the empowerment of the demo.

## **4 DEMOCRATIC PLATFORMS AND DEMO-CRATIC PLATFORMS**

The proposed discussion will take the site of the townhall of Barcelona, as an example of a Spanish city occupied by the municipalist movement: <https://www.decidim.barcelona>. It is analyzed the relation between the site as a virtual plataform to the institutional politics and the emergence of the political taking as a conceptual framework the idea of participation – from participation as vote to participation as direct action on space.

### **4.1 DEMOCRACY, VOTE AND OPTION(S)**

The virtual plataform produced in Barcelona is a mix of open source matrixes: Democracy21, D-Cent, Demokratian, DemocracyOS and Loomio created in places like Argentina, Spain, England, New Zeland. The common feature among them is the fact they all are a matrix that can be used by any group to build

their own site and they base their understanding of democracy resumed to vote. The sites produced all try to think democracy as a question of deliberation.

The vote problem is a central problem because the site gives to people the possibility to choose, but to choose between options already given. In a political science context, it is very easy to comprehend why the deliberation option is celebrated. If others town hall sites and its relations with the politics and political are analysed, it is going to be perceived how a city that gives a possibility to choose is a novelty in terms of democratic approach. But it is limited because people cannot build their own option. And even if they have the desire to do it, the site itself does not give to the citizens tools to build it, specially if it is considered the complexity of create public policies. As Marques (2017) states, the site with options approach creates dissent and helps to build autonomous citizens because debate is fomented but, at the same time, it create a destructive and not a constructive critic.

The participatory budget (orçamento participativo), an participatory initiative demanded by people from a city in south of Brazil at the beginning of the 80`s and that was transformed in public policy, has the same questioning in its history (SOUZA, 2006). In a first moment, it was celebrated as a new form of make politics with the help of citizens and it was replicated in a various numbers of Brazilian cities and even in other countries as an example of democratic approach to urban planning. Through assemblies and public encounters with common people, representatives of associations and Non-governmental groups, it was given to people the possibility to chose where to apply the city budget. The central point is that the options of use of the city budget were previously given. Such assemblies and encounters were not moments of discussion and creation because the State already proposed solutions based in technical studies with the popular participation as an optional approach. Since 2000, in Belo Horizonte city for example, such public policy became virtual too at the same time that the town hall decreased the percentage of the city budget to be discussed and deliberated in the participatory budget.

The option issue is a problem because this platform should permit and potentialize the possibility of invent new forms of manage the city as happened in 2011, in Puerta el Sol in Madrid and in many others cities. The platform informs a lot, but it lacks the possibility of people create its own possibilities, ones that are not already designed by the State. So, the point here is that the site should be more permissible to the possibility of invent options that are not stated. The site should create interfaces to people discuss among themselves and create. Instead of a site that informs, a site that promotes games between citizens, government officials and others could be a interesting manner to make the site a platform and not just a window-shop. Doing so, the site is not just a representative space of policys created outside her, but being a creational tool, it would be a device to create political inventions.

Using here the concept of black box of philosopher Villem Flusser (2002) regarding the limited relationship among photographer, photography and the photographic machine due the fact that the last is impenetrable to the conscious use of its internal mechanisms by the first, the site could be more than a black box if it were designed to be opened and played like a game – another Flusser`s concept (ASSIS, 2015). It is not just a matter of the right design of a certain type of pre-structured organization, but the idea of pre-structured that bases the whole site scheme.

The manners that people interact to the site are not specific, but generally the same as with another sites. What is different is the content of the information that the citizen will look for or give to the platform. What they get from the site is either a space to vote in some subject that affects the city or news informing new manners to work to the city or a possibility to insert themselves into the initiatives that are taking place in Barcelona sectors sponsored by Barcelona en Comú. New possibilities of not just work with the municipality, but to create with it through the virtual platform could be very interesting and considered if it the demo-cratic question is raised. That could take information and make it not just visible and public, but specially designed, articulating people that could work together, or that share the same interests in places very near from each other.

If the platform were to be more demo-cratic, a large variety and diverse possibility of situations should be possible to be invented. The demo-cratic site should be a virtual space where the people invent new forms of associations in order to dislocate themselves from the pre-structured paths of the State. More democracy means more possibility, even the ones that were not thought before the site was ready.

## 4.2 DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRACIES

The Democratic paradox stated by Mouffe proposes an understanding of democracy as a continuous movement between the political and politics, between direct action and representation. But it does not mean that the only democracy is one or another. Between occupy streets and votes inside representative spaces, there are a myriad of possibilities. If it is taken the municipalist heritage in consideration, the great urban planning advanced concept of such memory is that the planning activity is not an exclusivity of the State or of the nation.

In an urban planning sphere, such citizenship movements and neighborhoods associations are autonomous cells that produce and discuss their own strategies and tactics regarding urban planning. As SOUZA (2006) states, urban planning is not an exclusive activity of any power, specially the State. Organized groups and social movements that occupy streets or empty buildings, for example, make their own urban planning. Urban planning is not an exclusive activity of the State, although the State has the power to make it in a more complex and broader scope. This means that these other social-spatial actors act as urban planners, but they are not interested in constitute a central power. They battle for spaces, for representation, for inches in streets but they are not interested in replace the state, they are supplementary to the State. They add to the State possibilities of participation and planning that the State itself would never foresee.

The municipalist site should be more than just a space to present public policies created by the government, but a platform to launch initiatives with the aid of the State. If the site could be more a game than a reflex of a structure, like a platform it could be more decisive and more productive. State could help to invent and not to forbid the invention as it is seen all over the cities. New forms of exercise democracy and not only democracy could reinsert in the State a new way of urban planning.

If the municipalist history is related to more autonomous forms of planning and manage the cities, using neighborhoods as local cells of such decentralized organization, the site should be decentralized itself, giving to local people and collective associations possibilities to administrate the site, creating their own version for example. If the site can be used by associations and the people just as a place to get information, schedule, facebook addresses and pin local initiatives, it is limited.

## 5 CONCLUSION

A democratic platform is not enough to a municipalist approach to urban planning. If democracy is not a back and forth between direct action and representation, but between them invent new forms of act and plan the use and production of space; and if popular participation is not just a slogan or put all the information transparent to all but a program and objective to the municipalist project; any virtual platform have to be more than a representation of a space and an apparatus to act in space. Such platform should be either an agency of desires, actions and representations, which means that it should have as a central objective a democratic project, making possible alliances between groups and citizens in order to produce new identities, new groups, new people. This democratic approach should be aimed to the invention of new multiplicities.

The municipalists initiatives in Spanish cities are beginning to understand what means municipalism in XXIst century. Even if it is a preoccupation on how technologies and social media can help to build a more democratic virtual environment, it seems that they do not realized yet that this democratic project should be more open to the participation of everybody (including an every that does not exist), what means that the site is not only a reflex of a political project, but a tool to make it happen.

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