



**Democracy without growth:  
The political ecology of the Indignados movement**

*PhD Thesis*

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Ph.D. Programme in Environmental Science and Technology  
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Doctoral dissertation

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## Abstract

This thesis is an in-depth longitudinal study of the Indignados' movement in Barcelona, from the inception of its encampments in Plaza Catalunya, to its numerous commissions, neighborhood assemblies and the emergence of territorial projects. Over the course of three years, 74 in-depth interviews and 6 focus groups were held with movement participants, whilst approximately 600 hours of participant observation were conducted. The thesis investigates the political ecology of the Indignados' movement. Namely it aims to understand the ways in which the movement made sense of the ecological-economic crisis, and the new ideas and concrete socio-political processes and socio-ecological transformations it set in motion. Political ecology is here understood in a broad sense, as the new socio-natural worlds and relations the movement engendered, both cognitively and materially, as it imagined and enacted an alternative socio-ecological order.

If a socio-ecological transformation is to take place, it will be the result of democratic political processes in which social movements play a paramount role. Social movements are a lever of social change, as they contribute to cultural innovation and initiate institutional transformation. Hence this thesis looks at the possibility for social-ecological transformation through the lens of the Indignados' movement. Particularly it addresses the theory of degrowth, which can be described as a vision of a democratically led redistributive downscaling of production and consumption in industrialized countries. This research advances the theory of degrowth by connecting it with political theories on democracy, and by learning from an empirical case study, the Indignados' movement, centered upon the claim for a 'real democracy'.

The **first** chapter introduces a combined theoretical framework that includes theories of degrowth, democracy, political ecology and social movement studies, setting out the methodological frame and research questions. The **second** chapter is focused on a critical review of theory within the degrowth literature, shedding light on concepts such as democracy, autonomy, revolution and transition, drawing in particular on the philosophy of Cornelius Castoriadis, which the degrowth movement considers a key theoretical reference point. The second part of the thesis uses the Indignados' movement's radical imagination to explore and understand how democracy can be *thought* and *practiced* without growth, and how a social-ecological transformation towards degrowth can be envisaged. The **third** chapter uses the tool of framing analysis to understand how the movement frames its conception of

the crisis and democracy, and how it envisages change. This chapter also sheds light on the role of ideology within the movement and its distinctiveness from frames and on the ecological dimension of the movement, hence addressing the post-materialism thesis of New Social Movement theory. The **fourth** chapter investigates the micro-alternatives that have sprung out of the movement since the decentralization of the movement. It focuses on four specific case studies that evolved after the Square, bringing them into a dialogical relationship with the case study of the Square itself. In doing so, the chapter builds on the theory of prefigurative politics to analyse how the construction of alternatives can be explained, and how and why are they linked to space production, delving into the question of what is being prefigured by the indignant spatialised practices. Finally, the **final** chapter discusses the thesis results and concludes with their significance and contribution to a conceptualization of democracy and social-ecological change apt for degrowth and future research questions.

## Resumen

Esta tesis es un estudio longitudinal en profundidad del movimiento de los Indignados en Barcelona, desde el inicio de los campamentos en Plaza Catalunya hasta las numerosas asambleas de barrio, comisiones, y la emergencia de proyectos territoriales. Durante tres años fueron conducidas 74 entrevistas en profundidad y 6 grupos focales con los participantes del movimiento, mientras se emprendieron aproximadamente 600 horas de observación participante. La tesis investiga la ecología política del movimiento de los Indignados, concretamente pretende comprender las maneras en las que el movimiento ha entendido la crisis ecológica-económica, y las nuevas ideas y procesos socio-políticos y transformaciones socio-ecológicas que puso en marcha. La ecología política en esta tesis se entiende en su más sentido amplio, como las nuevas relaciones y realidades socio-naturales que el movimiento ha generado, tanto cognitivamente como materialmente, mientras imaginaba y ejecutaba un orden socio-ecológico alternativo.

Si una transformación socio-ecológica va a tener lugar, ésta será el resultado de procesos políticos democráticos en la que los movimientos sociales juegan un papel fundamental. Los movimientos sociales son un actor importante del cambio social, ya que contribuyen a la innovación cultural y empiezan la transformación institucional. Así pues, esta tesis considera la posibilidad de una transformación socio-ecológica a través de la perspectiva del movimiento de los Indignados. En particular aborda la teoría del decrecimiento que se puede describir como la visión de la reducción democrática y redistributiva de la producción y consumo en los países industrializados. Esta investigación avanza la teoría del decrecimiento conectándola con las teorías políticas sobre democracia, y aprendiendo de un caso de estudio empírico, el movimiento de los Indignados, centrado en la demanda de una ‘democracia real’.

El **primer** capítulo presenta un marco teórico multidisciplinar que incluye las teorías de decrecimiento, democracia, ecología política y estudios de movimientos sociales, y expone la metodología y las preguntas de investigación. El **segundo** capítulo se concentra en una revisión crítica de la teoría democrática dentro de la literatura sobre el decrecimiento, aclarando conceptos como democracia, autonomía, revolución y transición a través de la filosofía de Cornelius Castoriadis, que el movimiento del decrecimiento considera uno de los referentes teóricos.

La segunda parte de la tesis utiliza la imaginación radical del movimiento de los Indignados para explorar y comprender como la democracia puede ser concebida y practicada sin crecimiento, y como una transformación socio-ecológica hacia el decrecimiento se puede



imaginar. El **tercer** capítulo emplea la herramienta del análisis de marcos para comprender como el movimiento plantea la concepción de democracia y de crisis, y cómo concibe el cambio. Aclara también el papel de las ideologías dentro del movimiento y su diferenciación de los marcos y el papel de la dimensión ecológica del movimiento, abordando la tesis del post-materialismo de la teoría de los Nuevos Movimientos Sociales. El **cuarto** capítulo investiga las micro-alternativas emergidas desde el movimiento después de la descentralización a los barrios, enfocándose en cuatro casos de estudio nacidos después de la plaza, poniéndolos en relación dialógica con el caso de estudio de la plaza misma. El capítulo utiliza la teoría de la política prefigurativa para analizar como la construcción de alternativas puede explicarse y cómo y porqué está conectada con la producción de espacio, profundizando en la cuestión sobre que se prefigura en las prácticas espaciales indignadas.

El **último** capítulo discute los resultados de la tesis y concluye con su trascendencia y contribución para unas conceptualizaciones de democracia y de cambio socio-ecológico apropiadas para la teoría del decrecimiento y señala unas direcciones de investigación futura.

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## **List of acronyms**

15M: 15 May movement (Indignados)

A.M.P.A.: Association of Mothers and Fathers of schools students

CGMP: Changes to the General Metropolitan Plan

GA: General Assembly

GMP: General Metropolitan Plan

ID: Inclusive Democracy

IIS: The Imaginary Institution of Society

INCS: Inter-Neighbourhood Coordination Space

LGBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

NSM: New Social Movements

OPSV: Objective Problems-Subjective Values

PACD: Platform for the Citizens Audit of Debt

PAH: Platform of Mortgages Victims

RDN: Real Democracy Now

SSC: Sants Social Centre



# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1. Introduction

*“From a society partially euphoric in its belief in growth, it turned into a society mainly hit and without any grips to hold on to: terrified savers, indebted consumers, workers in fear of losing their jobs” (Férrandez et al. 2012)*

This thesis deals with questions of democracy, growth, and social movements. It uses the radical imagination of the Indignados’ movement (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2014) in Barcelona as an in-depth case study, to explore and understand how democracy can be *thought* and *practiced* without growth, and how a social-ecological transformation towards degrowth can be envisaged. Hence it builds on praxis, in the understanding that theory and practice must inform each other. To put it in Schlosberg’s (2013:50) words, “theorizing from movement experience works to expand our understanding of those movements; in return those movements can and do inform theory in productive ways”. Indeed, if degrowth is to become socially sustainable, and if a social-ecological transformation is to take place, it will be as a result of democratic political processes whereby social movements and incipient political formations bring forward the changes required for a sustainable degrowth transition, even if not explicitly in name. One such process holding that potential is the Indignados’ movement, which has for many embodied the promise towards the direction of social justice and real democracy. For this reason I am interested in the political ecology of the Indignados’ movement, that is in understanding the ways in which the movement made sense of the ecological-economic crisis, and the new ideas and concrete socio-political processes and changes it set in motion. Hence political ecology is here understood in a broad sense, as the new socio-natural worlds and relations the movement engendered, both cognitively and materially, as the movement imagines and enacts an alternative socio-ecological order.

But why would we need to speculate on a ‘democracy without growth’? And why should we look at the Indignados’ movement to gain theoretical insights about such a question? As I

explain more deeply below, this research topic is important for six main reasons: 1) we live in democratic systems and societies based on growth; 2) with the faltering of growth, the welfare state compromise on which political democracy of the golden post-war period was based gradually found it more difficult to balance the conflictive principles of democratic capitalism; 3) our democratic systems are gradually turning into “post-democracies” (Crouch, 2004); 4) mainstream political science has causally linked both growth and democracy, on the one hand, and on the other growth and environmental awareness, a relationship that needs to be scrutinized further; 5) movements born under the thrust of the crisis, such as the Indignados’ and Occupy movements are an important phenomenon of investigation, for their foregrounding claim for a ‘real democracy’ and because they provide an on-the-ground rebuttal of those alleged causal relationships and an important tool for exploring different forms of social organization, and 6) degrowth can offer an emerging theoretical framework for both deconstructing the growth paradigm and helping reconceptualize a different normative structure.

Since the post-war period, economic growth has been the policy objective of governments, leftist or rightist alike, pursued with the idea that it can act as a sort of “magic wand to achieve all sorts of goals” (Dale, 2012): from soothing class tension and reducing poverty to reducing the gap between ‘developed’ and ‘developing countries’, to fostering social capital, and steering environmental sustainability through ‘green growth. The ‘growth paradigm’ is founded upon a vision of the world in which ‘self-sustaining growth’ will bring material abundance and ensure economic and social stability by acting as a ‘social lubricant’ (Galbraith, 1958; Purdey, 2010). Both austerity and neo-keynesian policies aim at the expansion of production and consumption in the longer term, what they differ is on the ‘how’ (D’Alisa et al. 2015). Growth is an integral part of social life and it plays an important role in binding civil society into capitalist hegemonic structures (Dale, 2012; Purdey, 2010).

Indeed, the welfare state compromise is premised on an assumption of growth, and is intended to sustain and foster growth in a market-led economy (ibid). Political democracy is perceived as a political arrangement in which all sides involved – capital, labour, the public sector together with its social services – will be able to gain by means of economic growth (Offe, 2011). Fordism by means of the welfare state hence implied a pacification of the class cleavage: mass production required mass consumption, high wages and state intervention (Crouch, 2004; Della Porta, 2013b; Streeck, 2011). Brand and Wissen (2012) have stressed

how this compromise between capital and labor was one of the means for ensuring the hegemonic mode of consumption, production and distribution which they call ‘imperial mode of living’, based on unlimited appropriation of resources, space, labour and sinks, and the externalization of ecological costs to the global South.

Second, the conflict between social needs and ‘free play of market forces’ at the heart of ‘democratic capitalism’ could be balanced until economic growth continued apace, but gradually ceased to be so, as the ‘golden’ post-war period came to a halt roughly in the third quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Streeck, 2011). In Streeck’s analysis (2011:10), “more than two decades of uninterrupted growth resulted in deeply rooted popular perceptions of continuous economic progress as a right of democratic citizenship – perceptions that translated into political expectations, which governments felt constrained to honour but were less and less able to, as growth began to slow”. The slowing down of growth occurring since the late 1960s, and in a second stage, the espousing of economic liberalization, has translated into a series of sequential displacements of crises moving from one institutional domain to the next. moving the conflict from expansionary monetary policies (causing inflation) to labour markets (causing unemployment) and increasing levels of public debt, and then with financial deregulation policies, to private debt, mooring more vehemently at the electoral arena with the burst of the financial crisis (Streeck, 2013). Hence the build-up of debt, first public and then private, only fictitiously helped to preserve liberal democracy “counter-balancing” low growth, structural unemployment, deregulation of labour markets, stagnant or declining wages, and rising inequality (Schäfer and Streeck, 2013b).

The final stage of this gradual escalation of the conflict between the two principles of democratic capitalism is ‘liberalization-cum-fiscal discipline’, which limits democratic choice in the form of corrective interventions in the market and capacity for discretionary spending, and hence tends to aggravate what has been successfully called ‘post-democracy’ that is, the degeneration of representative democratic systems into *de facto* oligarchies (ibid; Crouch, 2004; Offe, 2012). This preemption of democracy is even more evident in the European Monetary Union, which has removed crucial instruments of macroeconomic management from the control of democratically accountable governments (Scharpf, 2011, 1999).

Third, the so-called crisis of democracy is a phenomenon that dates back even further, thus it can be argued that it was only aggravated with the economic crisis (Armingeon and



Guthmann, 2014). Over the past quarter-century in advanced industrial democracies, the traditional mechanisms of interest representation and demand formulation, starting from political parties, have been put into question. In most of these nations, comparative research has shown that electoral turnout and party membership have declined, citizens have become more distant from political parties, more critical towards elites and political institutions and less positively oriented toward governments, while empirical research on quality of democracy point at low quality of many democratic regimes (Dalton, 2004; Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Norris, 2011; Diamond and Morlino, 2005). On the other hand, unconventional forms of political participation have risen enormously (Cotta et al., 2008). As observed by Offe (2011:447):

*“Liberal democracies, and by far not just the new ones among them, are not functioning well. While there is no realistic and normatively respectable alternative to liberal democracy in sight, the widely observed decline of democratic politics, as well as state policies under democracy, provides reasons for concern. This concern is a challenge for sociologically informed political theorists to come up with designs for remedial innovations of liberal democracy”.*

Similarly, Rosanvallon (2011), denounces the shattering of democracy as testified by increasing inequality (Piketty, 2014), which widens the gap between democracy-regime and democracy-society.

Fourth, not only has the post-war welfare state compromise been imperiled, and post-democracy gained leeway, but if modernization theory is right, prospects have become bleak for the fate of our democratic futures. Indeed, for decades an axiom of mainstream political science has held that there is a positive causal relationship between growth and democracy, whereby economic development and growth bring about and foster democracy, while economic crises bring the reverse (Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Lipset, 1959; Friedman, 1962). In the words of Inglehart and Welzel (2005:160), “the tendency for democracy to go with high levels of socioeconomic development has become one of the most extensively validated statistical linkages in the social sciences”. Inglehart’s theory since the late 1970s has argued that there is a causal link between socio-economic development and self-expression values (cultural changes that place increasing emphasis on human emancipation and self-expression) which itself impacts on democratic institutions, for these values are inherently relevant to the civil and political liberties that constitute democracy.

Values of self-expression are themselves linked to social capital (ibid:163), a concept that is argued to have a positive causal relationship on growth (Whiteley, 2002; Putnam, 1993): the self-sustaining process of economic growth through culturally induced changes (continually reinforcing democracy) would hence be empirically demonstrated. In this impasse, in which “economic growth has become both the end and legitimation of government” (Brown, 2015:26), democracy is both dependent on growth and instrumental to further growth, and we should seriously be concerned over our democratic futures in a period of prolonged recession. While future prospects of growth seem arduous given recent trends, the search for ‘growth at all costs’ is vulnerable to criticism on many other grounds (as will be analysed below). Still, Inglehart’s ‘Silent Revolution’ (1977) continues to have a powerful impact on sociology and political science, including social movement studies.

Fifth, sprouting from our post-democracies in the midst of the economic crisis, movements such as those of the Indignados and Occupy, are an important phenomenon of investigation for their foregrounding claim of a ‘real democracy’. If we follow Inglehart’s thesis, these movements, triggered by the economic crisis and austerity policies, should be asking for growth. Indeed, for a prominent social movement scholar such as Della Porta (2013a:81), these movements were “opposing a neoliberal solution to the financial crisis, accused of further depressing consumption and thereby jeopardizing any prospects for development (whether sustainable or not)”. If this were truly the case, this case study could be read as a paradox by many political scientists and social movement authors, as it argues that the Indignados’ movement was also pleading for degrowth, asserting from the earliest days of the occupation of Plaza Catalunya (the so-called Manifesto of Minimal Demands), “The economic system cannot be based on indefinite growth. This is not sustainable”<sup>1</sup>. How then is it possible to explain this (alleged) paradox? As I will show, the Indignados’ movement offers an on-the-ground entry point for questioning those alleged causal relationships between growth, democracy and environmental values, and for exploring different forms of social organization and alternative imaginaries through on-field study of their ‘concrete utopias’, which envision and embody the “real possible” (Muraca, 2014).

Independently from the answer, which I will attempt to provide in the third chapter, these movements put centre-stage the question of democracy, and hence – in agreement with Della Porta (2013a) - they are important to study in order to understand alternative democracy conceptualizations, an investigation particularly important given the crisis of democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> The list of minimal demands can be found in this link: <https://acampadabcn.wordpress.com/demandes/>

Indeed, as I will argue below, social movements have always been concerned with democracy, and they are key actors in bringing about change.

The economic crisis also ‘unleashed a collection of cascading crises’ (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2014:1) (ecological, democracy, cultural, political, to name just a few), many of which have already been acknowledged for many years, but have come powerfully into the limelight with the combination of the permuted fiscal crisis of ‘privatised Keynesianism’ coupled with austerity policies. Morin (1968) suggests that a crisis both *reveals* and *has an effect*: it reveals what was latent and hidden at the heart of society, its ‘fundamental antagonisms and subterranean ruptures’ and shades light on its survival and transformation capacities, it creates a nascent state of what could bring about change. While crises can be re-absorbed and hence are only potentially evolutionary, they set in motion forces of decomposition, disorganization and destruction, but also forces of transformation, and are a sort of laboratory for studying *in vitro* evolutionary and transformation processes (ibid). The Indignados’ movement could offer an important case study for these emerging processes and socio-natures pointing to alternative futures.

Sixth, one of the dimensions of the crisis, the ecological one, is connected to the (ecological and social) unsustainability of growth, which has been analysed in depth by the degrowth critique. Degrowth theory, which will be further scrutinised in the theoretical framework of this article, is useful for understanding the Indignados’ movement because it theoretically departs from hegemonic ‘eco-social-economic win-win thinking’ and questions the intrinsic desirability of growth and its tautological function as both a means and an end. It opens a theoretical route for questioning the causal and ‘vicious circle’ relationships between growth and democracy on the one hand, and growth and environmental sustainability on the other, instead of giving it for granted. Post-democratic and neo-authoritarian tendencies are an important dimension of what Blühdorn & Welsh (2007) term a ‘politics of un-sustainability’. Degrowth denounces and unveils the depoliticization embedded by these axioms and opens the way for imagining alternative socio-ecological futures. As I will show, degrowth also reveals its usefulness as a theoretical complement to those indignant practices happening on the ground, towards more fully elaborating their radical imaginaries: cross-fertilization could occur in both ways.

In the following paragraphs I lay down the multi-disciplinary theoretical framework underpinning the work. In the third paragraph I will explain the research strategy of the thesis. I will then proceed with the results of my research (chapter 2, 3 and 4) and the discussions and conclusions chapter.

## **1.2. Theoretical framework**

This thesis spans several several academic fields. Its main theoretical framework relates to degrowth theory, but it is complemented with an innovative composite perspective that I call the “Political ecology of the new movements for real democracy”, divided into three components: democracy studies, social movement studies, and political ecology. This combined framework can help tackle a research approach that combines an in-depth study of the radical imagination of the Indignados’ movement, to further speculate on democracy conceptualizations for a degrowth social-ecological transformation. As put by Gibson-Graham and Roelvink (2010),

*“As a performative practice, academic research is activism; it participates in bringing new realities into being. Our role as academics has thus dramatically changed. We are less required to function as critics to excavate and assess what has already occurred and more and more pushed to adopt the stance of experimental researchers, opening to what can be learned from what is happening on the ground. To put this in the form of a mandate, we are being called to read the potentially positive futures barely visible in the present order of things, and to imagine how to strengthen and move them along”.*

In this thesis I do not just excavate and assess what happened in the Indignados’ movement, but I invoke its radical imagination, and move it forward to speculatively bring into being alternative social-ecological futures, going beyond the gap that exists between normative theory and empirical studies, and contributing to their dialogue. I follow Haiven and Khasnabish’s (2014) understanding of radical imagination as the capacity to think critically, reflexively and innovatively about the social world, the ability to imagine the world, life and social institutions not as they are but as they might otherwise be. Social movements are animated by the movement of the radical imagination as a collective process and by ‘everyday research’ in the form of constant experimentation and self-reflection over political ambitions, organizational norms, forms of democracy, institutional structures and social reproduction (ibid). Hence researchers normally benefit from this radical imagination and everyday

research conducted by social movements. Santos (2004:241, cited in Dinerstein, 2015:15) similarly refers to ‘sociology of emergences’, as a form of sociological imagination aiming to “identify and enlarge the signs of possible future experiences, under the guise of tendencies and latencies, that are actively ignored by hegemonic rationality and knowledge”. Levitas (2013) also offers a prefigurative method of sociological enquiry called ‘Imaginary Reconstitution of Society’ (IROS) allowing sociology to subject the present to critique and imagining human communities that do not yet exist. My goal in this thesis is not only to understand and analyse the movement’s radical imagination, but by reading the prefigurative potentialities, to continue such an imaginative movement towards a degrowth social-ecological transformation.

To engage in such a goal, a composite theoretical framework (see Figure 1) is necessary. Although one of the sources of degrowth is its concern with democracy, as an emerging theory degrowth lacks an articulation of deep democracy. Thus it would benefit from entering into dialogue with conceptualizations of democracy close to the degrowth critique, to enrich its analytical edge. A social movement perspective can help understand democratic transformations, bridging normative theories of democracy with empirical explanations through an investigation of the movement’s dynamics and cognitive dimension. Nevertheless, social movement studies is insufficient for grasping the material practices that the Indignados’ movement engendered. Following Harvey’s (1996) injunction, theory should not be laid down onto the world of political practices without embedding it into the materialities of place, space and the environment: new social relations as those engendered by the Indignados’ movement and its material practices produce new spatial relationships, new mappings, be they symbolic, figurative and material. What can be called the second variant of political ecology (Paulson, 2015), that is Anglo-Saxon political ecology, and more specifically urban political ecology and its concept of ‘social natures’ (Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2004) is used to decipher their spatial practices. The first variant of political ecology, particularly French political ecology (*écologie politique*), has represented a fertile source for degrowth. However, ecologism more widely, or radical green political thought, is used for a critique of economic rationality and productivism, and for a deeper conceptualization imaginaries of the movement, which have acquired a renewed role in degrowth (Kallis et al., 2015).

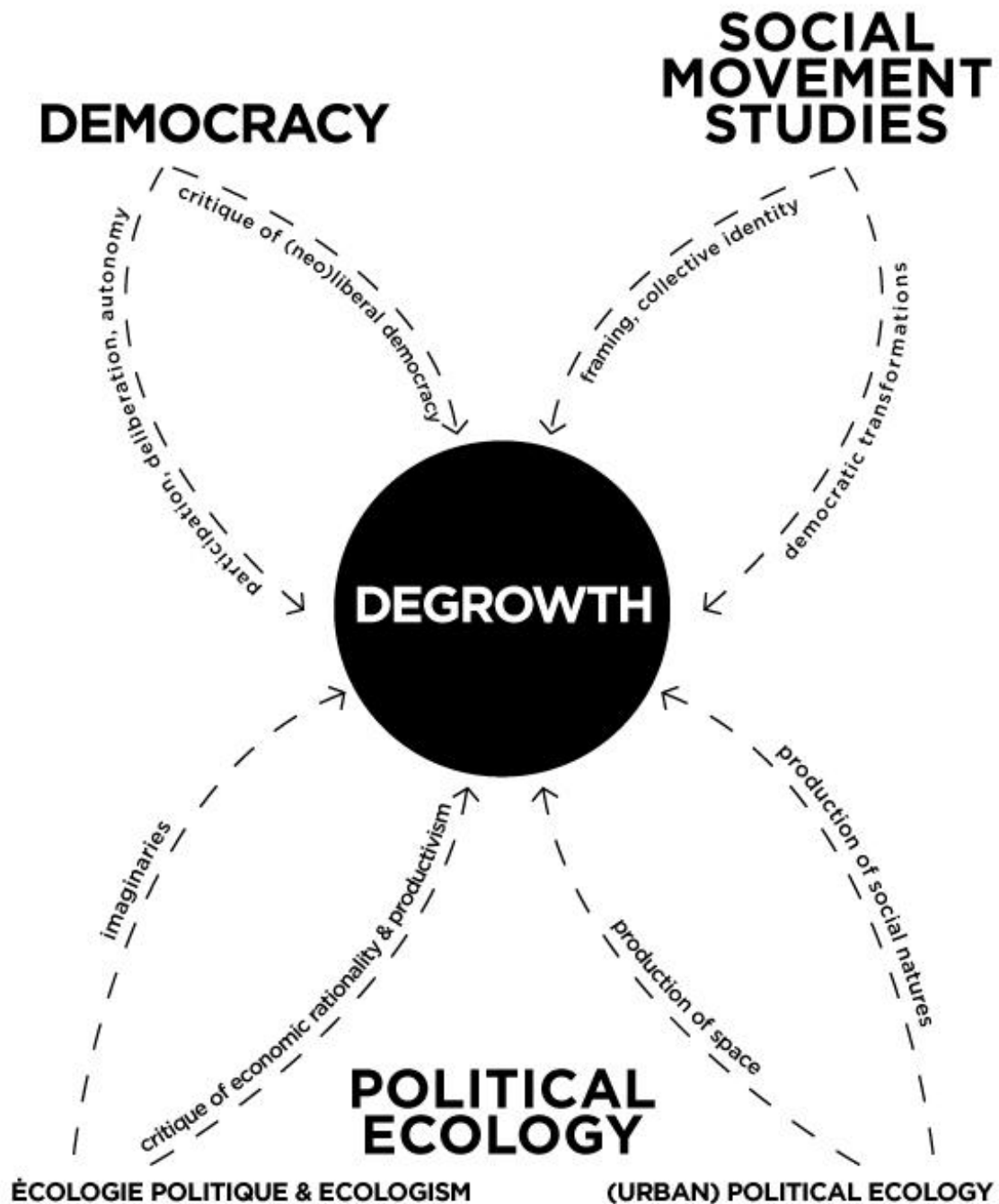


Figure 1. Theoretical framework.

### 1.2.1. Degrowth

The sustainable development model initiated almost thirty years ago (WCED, 1987), which depicted growth as the solution to social and environmental problems, has failed to produce an overarching framework for radical change. Notwithstanding these failures, and in line with

the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the 2002 Johannesburg conference postulates, the new green economy concept put forward at the Earth Summit Rio+20 Conference (UNEP, 2011), continues to foreground the alleged absence of any trade-off between growth, the environment and social justice, and sees solutions to environmental problems only in terms of internalizing externalities through market instruments and eliminating distortions to trade (Gómez-Baggethun and Naredo, 2015). Sustainable, sustained, equitable and inclusive growth is again seen as the solution to environmental problems (ibid).

Degrowth departs from these ecological modernization assumptions, which have been depicted as “post-ecological” (Blühdorn and Welsh, 2007), based on the “eco-economic win-win thinking” that capitalist principles of infinite economic growth and wealth accumulation are ecologically and socially sustainable (ibid). Having evolved from Mediterranean countries, degrowth has been spreading to other countries within and outside of Europe, giving rise not only to a blossoming scholarly literature (Whitehead 2013; Cattaneo et al 2012; Saed, 2012; Sekulova et al., 2013; Kallis et al., 2012; Schneider et al., 2010; Kosoy, 2013; see also review articles Demaria et al., 2013; Asara et al, 2015; Martinez-Alier et al., 2010; Muraca, 2013, and D’Alisa et al., 2015 containing contributions from more than 40 authors) but also to a new interpretative frame for a social movement (Demaria et al. 2014). Degrowth aims to repoliticize the debate on the relationships between sustainability, economy and society and advances a new vision of social-ecological transformation (Petridis, 2014; Spash and Kerschner, 2014; Asara et al., 2015). Re-politicizing the debate on sustainability involves putting into question the oxymoron of “sustainable development” and the assumption of compatibility between consumer capitalism and ecological sustainability fuelled by faith in eco-technology and market mechanisms (Fournier, 2008; Swyngedouw, 2015).

According to one of its most prominent authors, Serge Latouche (2011, 2013), and to Bonaiuti (2013), the degrowth movement was born in 2001-2002 from the encountering juncture between two different critiques of economics, the ecologist and the culturalist currents, coming from the 1970s. The former was founded upon bioeconomics, stemming from the thought of Nicholas Georgescu Roegen, and put economics into question through ecology. The latter was in contrast inspired by post-development and political ecology authors criticizing growth through development and its imaginary presuppositions, such as Ivan Illich, André Gorz, Cornelius Castoriadis, Bernard Charbonneau, François Partant,

Jacques Ellul, Latouche, as well as post-development authors such as Arturo Escobar and Gilber Rist. For Latouche, although “degrowth objectors” existed since earlier, “the fusion of these two forms constituted the birth act of degrowth” (Latouche, 2011: 8). Bonaiuti (2008; 2013) sees the encountering of these two lines of thought as indeed sharing similar pre-analytical premises, observing that Georgescu Roegen’s bioeconomics directly antagonized a sustainable development paradigm that failed to question the anthropological, political, cultural and institutional premises of the growth economies. Indeed Georgescu Roegen’s bioeconomics modified the way of conceiving the economic process by unveiling its entropic nature. While economic science was built on mechanistic paradigm (Newton-Laplace) and modeled on classic science, the thermodynamic revolution urged consideration of the fundamental element of irreversible time and the increase of entropy in a closed system, as: “the higher the economic development, the higher is the yearly amount of impoverishment [of entropy] r, and consequently shorter is the life expectancy of human species” (Georgescu, 2009:92). Hence Georgescu-Roegen’s bioeconomics considered techno-economic development in its biophysical rootedness, by highlighting the ecological limits to growth (Grinevald, 2008). Georgescu Roegen’s (1971) work, together with Kenneth Boulding’s (1966) thesis on biophysical limitations of economic activity and Karl Kapp’s (1961, 1970) reframing of environmental externalities as an inherent aspect of modern consumption and production are normally regarded as foundational ecological economics contributions.

The bioeconomics-ecological economics source of degrowth (Flipo, 2007; Demaria et al., 2013) has not only focused, following Georgescu Roegen’s steps, on the exhaustion of sources with sufficient high energy return on energy investment (Sorman and Gianpietro, 2013). Degrowth scholars have also reclaimed evidence provided by ecological economists who have challenged the possibility that economic growth can be decoupled from material and energy throughput (Jackson, 2009; Dietz and O’Neill, 2012). Even if there is some evidence for relative decoupling – i.e. that world GDP has risen faster than carbon dioxide emissions over the last 18 years (Jackson, 2009) – absolute decoupling, i.e. the decoupling of ecological intensity per unit of total economic output, is not occurring. Starting from ‘strong sustainability’ premises, degrowth challenges concepts such as dematerialization of the economy (Lorek, 2015), ecological modernization and green growth (Martinez-Alier, 2015; Latouche, 2009; Gómez-Baggethun and Naredo, 2015). The existence of the so-called environmental Kuznets Curve is seriously called into question when one takes into account the delocalization of production (Stern, 2004; Soumyananda, 2004; Galeotti et al, 2006;



Polimeni et al., 2008), one of the reasons being that improvements in eco-efficiency are often counterbalanced by the operation of the Jevons' Paradox or rebound effect. There is no evidence that the pace of growth of global materials use is slowing down, with an increase in material productivity a general feature of economic development (Krausman et al., 2009).

Nevertheless the first person to forge the term 'décroissance' was not a "bioeconomist" or an ecological economist but a political ecologist, André Gorz. This was in 1972, in a crowded debate organized in Paris by *Le Nouvel Observateur* (no. 397) in the tumultuous wake of by the Limits to Growth report, featuring also philosophers Herbert Marcuse and Edgard Morin, ecologist Edward Goldsmith, the trade-unionist Edmond Maire, the writer Philippe Saint Marc and President of the European Commission Sicco Mansholt. Interestingly, Gorz used the term in a rhetorical question in which he challenged the compatibility between the capitalist system and "degrowth of material production". Just a few months before, Sicco Mansholt, then Agriculture commissioner but soon to become President of the European Commission himself for a few months, sent a letter to the then president Franco Malfatti (Martinez-Alier, 2011; Duverger, 2011a:118-123), with the aim of outlining a series of public policies targeting the "problems of mankind": food production, industrialization, pollution, consumption of natural resources and population. Deeply inspired by the Limits to Growth report, which he cited in the first part of the letter, Mansholt was interested in devising a planned democratic socialism "not based on growth, at least in the material sector".

Subsequently, the term was used by philosopher André Amar in an issue of *Les Cahiers de la Nef* dedicated to "Growth objectors". For Amar, degrowth required an inquiry into growth's rootedness in Western modern civilization, and an inversion of moral values and change of thought (Amar, 1973; Muraca, 2013:149). While Mansholt used the term interchangeably with no growth, degrowth was finally established as an alternative to 'steady state' and 'zero growth' in a collection of papers by Georgescu Roegen (1979, with preface by Jacques Grinevald and Ivo Rens), following its proposal by Grinevald and Rens, very favourably taken by Georgescu (Grinevald, 2011:146-148). In the words of Grinevald (ibid:148): "the topic and term of degrowth (in French) came up frequently in our discussions on the future of "the industrial phase" of human evolution. This obviously clashed not only against the "growthmania" of economists, both Marxist and liberal, but also our Eurocentric progressive conception of the history of ways of life and human societies".

As noted by Kallis et al. (2015), interest in degrowth faded with the end of the oil crisis and the advent of neoliberalism, but nevertheless, resurged, and as identified by Latouche (2011, 2013), gave birth to the degrowth movement in 2001. The term “sustainable degrowth” was first launched by Bruno Clémentin and Vincent Cheynet in that year, and in February 2002 a special issue was published in the journal *Silence* (n. 280), edited by the two in tribute to Georgescu Roegen. That spring a colloquium “Undoing development, redoing the world” was held at UNESCO in Paris, targeting economic development in developing countries (Duverger, 2011b; Muraca, 2013; Kallis et al., 2015). When the first international colloquium on sustainable degrowth was organized in 2003 in Lyon, gathering 300 participants from France, Switzerland and Italy, degrowth had established itself as an international movement (ibid).

Degrowth became “both a banner associated with social and environmental movements and an emergent concept in academic and intellectual circles, they are interdependent and affect each other” (Martinez-Alier et al. 2010: 1742). Similarly, for Duverger (2011b:16) degrowth is composed by two inseparable sides, as it is both a movement and a thought in progress. For Demaria et al (2013) degrowth is an interpretative frame for a social movement constituted by a large array of concerns, goals, strategies and actors, from campaigners working to stop the expansion of highways and other infrastructures, to participants of Solidarity Economy Networks, agroecological food cooperatives, protesters for car-free cities, and researchers (Kallis et al. 2015:3). The movement has become organized at the international level as well, and has seen the organization of at least five international conferences in Paris (2008), Barcelona (2010), Venice (2012), Montreal (2011) and Leipzig (2014), with an increasing number of participants (the first conference in France was attended by 100 participants, while in Leipzig there were about 3,000) and the next one planned for Budapest in 2016. A multiplicity of books and academic articles have been devoted to the topic, and the English term has entered academic journals with over 100 published articles and eight special issues in peer-reviewed journals (see references at the beginning of the paragraph).

Degrowth has been depicted as “a performative fiction indicating the necessity of a rupture with the growth society” (Latouche, 2013:7), “a political slogan with theoretical implications (...) that wants to make explode the hypocrisy of those doped by productivism” (Latouche, 2008b:17), a “missile word” (Ariès, 2005) repoliticizing environmentalism and the debate on the relationships between economy, sustainability and society that had been depoliticized by

the concept of sustainable development (Kallis et al, 2015:9). Ecological economists have tried to pinpoint the concept more concretely by defining it through a downscaling movement: Schneider et al. (2010:512) first defined it as “an equitable down-scaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global level, in the short and long term”, a definition adopted by Demaria et al. 2013, with additional emphasis on the democratic basis aimed at social justice<sup>2</sup>, and by Sekulova et al. (2013), stressing the decreasing importance of the role of markets and commercial exchanges as a central organizing principle of human lives.

Ecological economists have sometimes used the adjective “socially sustainable” to distinguish the normative content-objective of degrowth as being environmentally and socially sustainable from ‘unsustainable degrowth’, i.e. economic recession or depression with deterioration of social conditions (Schneider et al., 2010). Growth economies do not know how to degrow: there is nothing worse than a growth society that does not grow (Latouche, 2008b:18; Kallis et al., 2012). Kallis (2011:875) hence describes degrowth as the hypothesis that inevitable – and desirable – economic (GDP) degrowth can be turned into one that is socially sustainable. Latouche (2011:169) contrasts “chosen degrowth” with “subjected degrowth”, and Bonaiuti (2013) talks about a twofold meaning of the term degrowth, that can both signify the real economic degrowth and degrowth as a social project and a utopia. To him this double meaning represents both a source of confusion but also a source of strength. Bonaiuti (2013) indeed presents a theory of marginal decreasing returns that since the oil crisis has marked a new era of flexible accumulation capitalism that followed the Keynesian-Fordist capitalism of the post-war period. For Bonaiuti, economic degrowth is inevitable, and principally led by progressive social complexification entailing disparate phenomena from the crisis of the welfare state to distributional conflict. However, degrowth as a utopian social project is only one of the scenario ahead of the great transition facing humanity because of ecological limits (ibid).

More generally, from a degrowth perspective the current crisis is the result of systemic limits to growth (Kallis et al. 2015). Kallis et al. (2009) argue that the root of the crisis is the growing disjuncture between the real economy of production and the paper economy of finance. Indeed, ecological limits have been stressed by eco-Marxists in the past. For Harvey (2014) endless compound growth is the fifteenth contradiction of capital, based on the

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<sup>2</sup> Demaria et al. (2013:209) define degrowth as “a democratically led redistributive downscaling of production and consumption in industrialised countries as a means to achieve environmental sustainability, social justice and well-being”.

physical limit to the expansion of capital and commodification. This contradiction recalls O'Connor's (1998) second contradiction of capitalism, of undermining systematically the biophysical conditions that it depends upon in the pursuit of capital accumulation, although there are no automatic connections between biophysical limits, increases in costs of capital and the end of capital accumulation (Klitgaard, 2013). While of course the acknowledgement of the entropic nature of economics stressed since Boulding's (1966) "The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth" and Georgescu Roegen's (1971) *The Entropy Law* also involves the recognition of ecological limits to growth, other authors (Kerschner, 2014) also retrieve in peak oil and the related reduction of energy return on investment (EROI), a boundary that will delimit the expansion of oil's commodity frontiers. Similarly, the notion of planetary boundaries has recently been used to operationally define nine fundamental thresholds related to Earth system processes (Rockström et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, while some degrowth authors from a critical realist philosophy of science have argued for the need for objective limits (Smith-Spash, 2014), others have stressed that absolute or objective external limits do not exist as such, but there are thresholds beyond which particular undesirable outcomes are likely (Deriu, 2008; Kallis, 2014). Recognizing the importance of defining ecological limits in which economic activity should be embedded is not sufficient (Deriu, 2008; Muraca, 2013). On the one hand, it should be acknowledged that the ecological crisis directly stems from the 'imperial mode of living' of the global North, which is "rooted in prevailing political, economic, and cultural everyday structures" (Brand and Wissen, 2012:555). In this vein, degrowth is not only environmentally unsustainable, but also unjust, and connects with concepts such as recognition and reparation of ecological debt, post-extractivism and *Buen Vivir* (Martinez-Alier, 2012; Demaria et al., 2013). On the other hand, in degrowth there is common ground in that ecology by itself cannot pinpoint the way or the normative ground about how to reach this goal (Muraca, 2013; Deriu, 2008). The importance of the democratic process (see section 1.2.2.1) in bringing about degrowth has indeed been emphasized and identified as one of the sources of degrowth (Flipo, 2007; Demaria et al., 2013): degrowth opens the democratic discussion of selective downscaling of manmade capital and of the institutions needed for such a "prosperous way down" (Odum and Odum, 2001). As it will be argued in the second chapter, an important lesson taken by early political ecologists is that degrowth involves a (collective and individual) self-limitation movement (Muraca, 2013; Kallis et al., 2015; Asara et al., 2013; Latouche, 2011:174).

Growth is not only unsustainable, unjust or unfeasible in the long term. In line with the “culturalist” stream and what has been termed the ‘meaning of life / well-being’ source of degrowth (Schneider et al., 2010; Demaria et al., 2013), one strand of literature has focused on demonstrating that growth is neither socially sustainable nor desirable from a well-being perspective. Growth is criticized for its social downsides, as after a certain point, more growth fails to improve peoples’ lives. The so-called Easterlin (1974) Paradox in particular refers to the absence of a correlation between income growth and reported subjective well-being within countries over time. What Max-Neef (1995) has called the “threshold hypothesis” holds that after a certain threshold point, economic growth does not bring about improvements in quality of life, but rather can lead to deterioration. Happiness studies have verified the assertions of the Easterlin Paradox, also demonstrating that happiness is linked to GDP up to a certain point, after which it begins to decline. These findings have been related both to hedonic adaptation – the tendency of at least some good or bad experiences to lessen as individuals adjust to a new state of affairs (Frederick and Loewenstein, 1999), and to the social limits to growth (Kallis, 2015; Sekulova, 2015). They are also in accordance with what Daly (1996:36) described as the self-cancelling effects on welfare at the aggregate level due to the zero-sum game resulting from the struggle for relative shares. While growth in the post-war era came to be seen as a proxy for the profitability of national economies and as a “magic wand to achieve all sorts of goals” (Dale, 2012; Purdey, 2010), other studies have focused on basic entitlements such as life expectancy, health and educational participation, and even employment (Jackson, 2009; Chancel et al., 2013; Kallis et al, 2013; Pickett and Wilkinson, 2009). The degree of equality is a much more critical variable for improvements of health and for lessening social ills (ibid). One of the factors leading to Daly’s (1999) “uneconomic growth” – the expansion of forms of activities which after a threshold undermine human flourishing – is related to Hirsch’s (1976) social limits to growth. Hirsch noted that with the growth in the scale of consumption, an increasing amount of spending is shifted from ‘basic goods’ to ‘positional goods’, whose value is tied to their relative scarcity and to their status. The systemic consequence of the increased consumption of positional goods and economic growth is the creation of congestion and competition (Hirsch, 1976; Kallis, 2014; Bonaiuti, 2012b), which in turn creates distress, anxiety, and emotional disorders (Jackson, 2009; Pickett and Wilkinson, 2009; Kasser, 2002).

The ideological role of growth stems from what Dale (2012) calls its “idealised refiguration” of capitalist social relations. This refiguration occurs through the naturalization of the

prevailing social order, in which the interests of capital are identified with the common good, as evident from the trickle-down hypothesis. Since the 1980s, post-development theorists have been questioning the relationship between poverty, growth, inequality and development. Socio-economic inequality, poverty and exclusion were reconceptualized as a product of orthodox economic growth, and inequalities unveiled themselves as a driver of growth (Rist, 1996; Latouche, 2004). The growth system rests upon a paradoxical combination of promised abundance and structural scarcity, in which desires are transformed into needs and needs are reduced to solvent demand (Rist, 1996). Since the advent of the Fordist accumulation regime, a significant part of consumption has become mass positional consumption (Baudrillard, 1970; Jessop, 2013), engendering consumerism, the objectification of social relationships and individuals, a generalised sense of dissatisfaction (Baudrillard, 1970), and the belief that human well-being is to be improved by increasing the volume and quantity of goods and services consumed (Hamilton, 2010). The logic of market expansion came into concordance with the extrinsic life goals of individuals, a phenomenon Hamilton (2003) calls 'growth fetishism'. Unlimited growth of consumption and production forces and the thrust toward the unlimited extension of rational mastery was uncovered indeed by Castoriadis (1985; 2007) as a central objective of Western societies' human existence, what he calls an imaginary social signification, which for him included the belief in the virtual omnipotence of technology and scientific knowledge, the rationality of economic mechanisms and various assumptions on homo economicus, the invisible hand and the virtues of free competition.

Indeed, degrowth implies a critique of 'commodification' or 'economization', that is the increasing "conversion of social products and socio-ecological services and relations into commodities with a monetary value" (Kallis et al., 2015:4). Commodification is a fundamental tool for making economic growth possible (Altvater, 2012; Victor, 2015). Several authors indeed retrieve in the crisis the effect of a heightened Polanyan process of disembedding (Altvater, 2012) or a second great transformation (Fraser, 2012). In this sense, taking inspiration from philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, Latouche talks about the need to decolonize our imaginary and escape from the economy: we should exit the economization of minds concomitant to the commodification of the world (Latouche, 2015:118), invert the process by which presumed "natural" economic laws dominate social and political concerns, and question the imperialism of economic science. Escaping the economy thus means to oppose economism and return to the terrain of the political (Fournier, 2008). The critique of economization also connects with the anti-utilitarian and anthropological source of degrowth,

which questions the hegemony of the epistemological postulates of economics in the humanities and social sciences. Such postulates should be scrutinised as they are based on holism, methodological individualism, and the simplification of the complexity of human beings and their interpersonal relationships as being self-interested, pleasure-seeking and utility-maximising (D'Alisa et al., 2013; Romano, 2015).

Degrowth implies a web of micro and macro level transformations (Sekulova et al., 2013) aimed at changing the imaginary fundamentals of instrumental rationality, consumerism, utilitarianism and productivism (Muraca, 2013). These fundamentals are typical of what Brand terms “the imperial mode of living” (Brand and Wissen, 2012). The envisioned degrowth future is for most degrowth scholars post- or non-capitalist (Blauwhof, 2012; Trainer, 2012; Altvater, 2012; Kallis et al. 2015)<sup>3</sup> one in which commons would have a preponderant role. A social-ecological transformation towards degrowth has been envisioned as including a variety of actors and strategies, including: ‘non reformist reforms’ aimed at redistribution and ‘setting limits’ to work, natural resource consumption and wealth creation, through policies such as maximum income, basic income, work sharing, reduction of working hours, taxation on resources or rationing, job guarantees, public money and debt audits; grassroots economic practices (Kallis et al. 2015) such as eco-communities, cooperatives, time banks, urban gardens etc; ‘nowtopians’ (Carlsson and Manning, 2010) practicing non-wage work, practices of disobedience (such as squatting); and ‘uncivil actors’ (D'Alisa et al., 2013) and social movements such as the Indignados and Occupy movements (Kallis et al. 2015). Indeed, according to Swyngedouw (2014) politicizing degrowth involves the production of new socio-ecological relations and imaginaries, such as the politicized staging of new practices of being-in-common typical of the Indignados and Occupy movement, and the inauguration of new democratic political trajectories or egalibertarian practices, which degrowth should sustain and nurture.

The search for more radical democracy has indeed been identified as a source of degrowth (Flipo, 2007; Demaria et al. 2013) directly related to the escape from economism, and the re-imagination of economic relations in different terms, by going back to the terrain of the political (Fournier, 2008). As Fournier remarks, degrowth is wary of ecological imperative discourse, and would frame ecology as a question of democracy. Similarly, Gorz and

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<sup>3</sup> Exceptions mainly come from the steady-state perspective (Daly, 2010; Lawn, 2011), which are nevertheless part of the broader ‘post-growth framework’.

Latouche have repeatedly warned against the dangers of ecological determinism, which could bring toward a sort of techno-fascism if not managed democratically. Along this line, Gorz differentiates between ecology and ecologism: “Ecology, differently from ecologism, does not imply the rejection of authoritarian, technofascist solutions. Ecologism uses ecology as a lever for a radical critique of this civilization and society. But ecology could also be used for the exaltation of applied engineering to the living systems” (Gorz, 1975:24). Similarly, Castoriadis (2010a:201) warned that “if there is no new movement, no revival of the project of democracy, ‘ecology’ can very well be integrated in a neo-fascist ideology”.

Degrowth scholars have tried to tackle the question paradigmatically put by Johansova and Wolf (2012:563) as: “what forms of ‘deep’ democracy for a society that degrows?”. Most authors have advanced a participatory, decentralized vision of democracy, which consistently with economic relocalization proposals, has been imagined as a cooperative network of economic and institutional organizations (Bonaiuti, 2012a; Trainer, 2012). Such a vision is founded upon deliberative practices interacting with representative institutions (Deriu, 2012; Latouche, 2005b) or founded upon confederal direct democracy (Fotopoulos, 2005; Magnaghi, 2000). These perspectives are grounded in a revitalization of local democracy informed by conceptions of territorial self-government and self-reliance (as opposed to self-sufficiency) (Latouche, 2005a; Magnaghi, 2000; Deriu, 2012; Trainer, 2012; Bonaiuti, 2012a) and on the flourishing of grassroots practices and institutions that constitute some form of commoning, from cooperatives, to urban gardens, to community currencies and eco-communities (Kallis et al. 2015; Deriu, 2012; Johansova et al. 2013; Cattaneo and Gavalda, 2010). Some degrowth scholars have nevertheless warned against the risks implied in some radical form of localism that could hide relations of oppression and domination, hence highlighting the role of economic interdependency (Muraca, 2012:544). These conceptualizations are quite close to visions of ecological and participatory democracy elaborated in the wider literature of environmental political thought and political ecology. Therefore, in the next section of the combined analytical structure supporting this theoretical framework of this thesis, I will contrast degrowth literature with wider debates on liberal democracy and relevant alternative conceptions, including participatory, direct and ecological democracy. I will then review the social movement studies and political ecology literatures.



## 1.2.2. Political ecology of the new movements for real democracy

### 1.2.2.1. Democracy

In a special issue about degrowth futures and democracy (Cattaneo et al., 2012), Romano (2012) intriguingly argues that degrowth authors are wrong in assuming that a deepening of democracy will lead to the increased espousal of ecological (or degrowth) objectives. This is because “if our project is indeed one of a real, radical democracy, we would not then complain if the process leads to the loss of a ‘shared vision’, an irrationality of exchanges, or an incompatibility of production processes with environmental balances and so on” (ibid:584).<sup>4</sup> He thus maintains that the call for ‘ecological democracy’, often mentioned in degrowth discussions about democracy, is “wishful thinking”, similar to the exercise of attaching adjectives like ‘sustainable’ to ‘development’. Accordingly he asks, “who would ensure that citizens comply with a culture of sobriety, prefer small shops to shopping centers, small buildings to skyscrapers, and all the rest?” (ibid: 584).

In Anglo-Saxon literature the debate lying at the crossroad between green political theory and democracy is indeed often referred to as ‘ecological democracy’ or ‘green democracy’. This debate – very far from being homogeneous or constituting “a school of thought” - can fertilize emerging exchanges on democracy within the degrowth literature. Indeed, similarly to Romano (2012), in the Anglo-Saxon green political thought, several authors have warned about the tension between the ‘proceduralism’ of democracy and the ‘consequentialism’ of green concerns (Dobson, 1990 [2008]:108), and stressed that there is no logically or conceptually necessary connection between a commitment to environmental values and a commitment to democracy (Ball, 2006; Saward, 2000; Latta, 2007). However, can one not assume a connection between ecologism or degrowth on the one side, and democracy, on the other? Should we restrain from reflecting on conceptualizations of democracy that envisions and take into consideration ecological concerns? Is democratic decision-making really to act in a vacuum? Ought we to simply count on the “new pattern of subjectivity” on which Romano relies, or should we revisit the meaning of democracy? While the first two questions are more deeply dealt with in the second chapter from a Castoriadian perspective, in this

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<sup>4</sup> He then seems to contradict himself in the conclusions of his article by maintaining, through Castoriadian concepts, that “those who care about creating an alternative degrowth future need to (...) put in the political arena a model of protection that places the preservation of the natural balance (and hence degrowth ) at its center, as well as the self-establishment (self-institution) of society, that is the return of collective sovereignty and of a real democracy” (Romano, 2012:589).

paragraph I would like to approach the topic from a somewhat different angle, focusing especially on the latter two questions.

Of course different adjectives have been attached to the word democracy, such as ecological, but also participatory (Pateman, Macpherson), strong (Barber), deliberative (Cohen), direct (Callinicos, Castoriadis, Fotopoulos), radical (Mouffe and Laclau) etc. These adjectives are for the most part linked to different conceptions of democracy, expressions that have been forged mainly to differentiate them from liberal and procedural democracy<sup>5</sup>. Nowadays, the hegemonic definitions of liberal democracy put forth a procedural conception of democracy, advocated by authors such as Dahl, Kelsen, Bobbio and Almond and Verba's Civic Culture, which for many respects retains several elements akin to the elitist conceptualization of democracy elaborated by Schumpeter, and before him, Weber (Held, 2006).

Schumpeter (1976) conceived of democratic life as the struggle between rival political leaders and parties with the objective to rule, hence democracy was quite removed from its original value of popular sovereignty and equality. He attacked what he – quite imprecisely (Pateman, 1970:17; Held, 2006: 146) – termed ‘classical doctrine of democracy’, for its idea of a ‘common good’ which for him was misleading as people have different wants and values. Democracy was for him to be understood as ‘competitive elitism’, a method in which people act as electors by choosing between teams of leaders (Held, 2006). Democracy as a method, or as a ‘minimal definition’, was taken by pluralists such as Dahl (1956; 1971) who defined ‘really existing democracies’ (or polyarchies) as “a political system one of the characteristics of which is the quality of being completely or almost completely responsive to all its citizens” (Dahl 1971:2). In the polyarchy, responsiveness was measured in terms of equal weighting of citizens’ preferences, itself guaranteed by a set of procedures or requirements including free and competitive elections, alternative sources of information, freedom of expression and to form or join organizations. This definition is based on the premise that a set of rules can guarantee the respect of civil and political rights, and hinges upon the *formal* dimension of democracy, distinguished from the content of the system. Pluralists and elitists can indeed be

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<sup>5</sup> Liberal democracy is a regime in which to the rights of the liberal tradition have been added the democratic conceptions of popular sovereignty, after a period in which, following the French revolution, the liberal and the democratic parties were counter-posed in several Western European countries (Bobbio, 2010:105). This marriage would result in that democracy, the regime of autonomy (or self-government) and direct democracy during Ancient Greeks, would espouse, in its liberal democracy form, the two fundamental values of freedom and equality (ibid:102-106), respectively coming from the two traditions, but intended in a quite peculiar fashion. Freedom, as part of the liberal tradition, came to be conceived negatively, as ‘freedom from’ and not as a positive injunction as ‘freedom to’ (connected to the original democratic principle of autonomy), while equality was relegated to its formal, political dimension (ibid: 132).

considered as part of the same model, as Macpherson (1977:77) does, calling it a ‘pluralist elitist equilibrium model’:

*“it is pluralist in that it starts from the assumption that the society which a modern democratic political system must fit is a plural society, that is, a society consisting of individuals each of whom is pulled in many directions by his many interests, now in company with one group of his fellows, now with another. It is elitist in that it assigns the main role in the political process to self-chosen groups of leaders. It is an equilibrium model in that it presents the democratic process as a system which maintains an equilibrium between the demand and supply of political goods”.*

Pluralists, who considered that a degree of apathy on the part of citizens was functional for the democratic stability, aimed to describe the real workings of democracy, and referred to their theory as ‘empirical democratic theory’. Nevertheless, as noted by Held (2006:166), pluralists “by defining democracy in terms of what is conventionally called ‘democracy’ in the West (...) tended to slide from a descriptive-explanatory account of democracy to a new normative theory. Their ‘realism’ entailed conceiving of democracy in terms of the actual features of Western polities. In thinking of democracy in this way, they recast its meaning and, in so doing, surrendered the rich history of the idea of democracy to the existent”.

Indeed, some radical political ecologists have criticized liberal democracy for its inability to respond adequately to the environmental challenge (Mathews, 2007; Eckersley, 2004, 2007; Barns, 1995; Dobson, 2008:155). Also, most French political ecologists, along with Gorz and Castoriadis, would agree with Alain Lipietz that “the main adversary of political ecology...is economic liberalism” (Whiteside, 2002: 243), and embrace a democratic conception that diverges from liberal democracy. To use Val Plumwood’s (1995:143) words: “The inevitable outcome of attempting to give priority to saving the conventional identification of liberalism with democracy is to cast the ecological failure of liberalism as a conflict between environment and democracy”. Such a casting can sometimes result in the rejection of any efforts to imagine alternative conceptions of democracy (as Romano declares), or even result in lending support to authoritarian solutions, as in Ball’s (2006) ‘biocracy’, or in the right-wing version of degrowth by Alain De Benoist (Muraca, 2013: 154), or still in Garver’s (2013) ambiguous “rule of ecological law”, perceived as a complement to degrowth and setting the ecological law’s primacy over the social realm.

In opposition to these drifts, some radical political ecologists (Barns, 1995; Eckersley, 2004) argue that the flourishing of a real democracy that seriously takes into account ecological values would need to go beyond the proceduralist, liberal democracy, which is incompatible with some shared, substantive vision of ‘the good life’. This is a position shared by some degrowth scholars. Romano (2012:585) argues that in modernity everyone is prevented from translating her own individual sense into a collective construction, thereby limiting the implementation of any collective political vision. Similarly, Muraca (2012), building on the capabilities approach and Honneth’s conceptualization of recognition argues that in a degrowth society, claims for the good life should not be conceived as consisting of individual choices that should indifferently coexist in society, but they should be considered as constitutive for justice, and thus be an object of collective negotiation.

Further, liberal democratic policymaking is not even impartial, as it displays a systematic bias against the protection of public environmental interests and in favor of private interests (Eckersley, 2004). At the same time, environmental concerns are also ‘ranked differently’ from other competing preferences and liberal freedoms (including freedom of contract) which are expressed as rights in constitutional structures, and are therefore considered negotiable (ibid). This failed neutrality directly stems from the very fact that the confinement of claims for the good life to the field of life-style decisions paradoxically implies a particular claim for a substantial understanding of collective good life (Muraca, 2012:542-543).

Ecofeminist Plumwood (1995) goes deeper into the issue. She argues that it is the democratic failures of liberal democracy that have betrayed ecology through “its steadfast commitment to an alliance with privilege and economic power, and the contradictions between its rhetorical assertion of democratic principles and the crippling limitations it imposes on their application” (ibid: 144). The democratic project has thus been jeopardized in current forms of liberal democracy by the absence of economic, household and workplace democracy. The persistence of radical inequalities and oppression in liberal polities, the placing of crucial areas of environmental impact such as the institutions of accumulation, property (including women, laboring and the colonized and nature), the market and production beyond the range of democratic correction and reshaping, the privileging of private interest over forms of collective life, the fostering of a technocratic orientation and a disregard for natural limits are some of the elements that should lead us – instead of positing a fundamental conflict between ecologism and democracy - to explore more thorough forms of democracy. For Plumwood

many of these features are inter-connected with a liberal conception of self as self-maximising, self-contained individuals immersed in a cultural climate pitting against the reason versus nature dualism in a hierarchical fashion (at the detriment of ‘lower’ aspects of self such as material desire and consumption, bodily need and care, material production and labour)<sup>6</sup>.

Much of Plumwood’s critique indeed hinges upon one of the models of democracy alternative to liberal democracy, i.e. participatory democracy, specifically she is mostly influenced by Carole Pateman. Following the student and New Left movement (and the 1964 Port Huron Statement), theorists such as C. B. Macpherson and Carole Pateman aimed to go beyond procedural models of liberal democracy by revisiting and at the same time questioning founding authors of modern democratic tradition from XVIII and XIX century: the “good dimension” of early liberal democracy theory embodied in John Stuart Mill, as well as democratic theorist Jean-Jacques Rousseau. According to Macpherson, J.S. Mill’s conceptualization does not escape the source of the failure and problems of liberal democracy, i.e. the attempt “to fit a scheme of democratic government onto a class-divided society” (ibid:9). Nevertheless, he combined the two pillars of liberal democracy - market freedoms and capitalism, and the freedom to realize her/his human capacities – in such a way as to be solved to the advantage of the latter. Indeed the concept of liberal democracy “became possible only when theorists – first a few and then most liberal theorists – found reasons for believing that ‘one man, one vote’ would not be dangerous to property, or to the continuance of class-divided societies” (Macpherson, 1977:10). Similarly, for Rousseau participation meant participation in the making of decisions, founded upon economic equality (only a very limited property right was morally justifiable) and freedom, because citizens acquire control over the course of their life (Pateman, 1970:42; Macpherson, 1977).

Macpherson and Pateman criticized the *formal* equality of liberal democracy, as political equality should refer to equality of power in determining the outcome of decisions (Pateman, 1970). Participatory democracy theory puts into question the idea that individuals can be considered in isolation from institutions: one important prerequisite for a participatory society would hence be “a great reduction of the present social and economic inequality, since that

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<sup>6</sup> For Plumwood (1995) the foregrounding role of rationality conflicts with relationships of kinship, care, dependency and mutuality – hence engendering a conception of the political encounter of democracy as occurring in a fundamentally instrumental community. Freedom comes hence to be interpreted in elitist and masculinist terms as lack of relationship and denial of responsibility, self-determination as the rational mastery of external life conditions, through maximizing transcendence of necessity and through control over the other, over the ‘lower’ aspects of self and over nature (Plumwood, 1995).

inequality (..) requires a non-participatory party system to hold the society together” (Macpherson, 1977:100). Further, both Pateman and Macpherson stress that participation and democracy should take place also in spheres different from political institutions: from schools to industry and factories, from households to parties and state bureaucracies, because their democratization is also required to ensure political equality: “For a democratic polity to exist it is necessary a participatory society to exist, i.e. a society where all political systems have been democratized and socialization through participation can take place in all areas” (Pateman, 1970). The major function of participation in the theory of participatory democracy is an educative one, including the very formation of an individual’s psychology and a change in peoples’ consciousness, “from seeing themselves and acting as essentially consumers to seeing themselves and acting as exerters and enjoyers of the exertion and development of their capacities” (Macpherson, 1977:99). Macpherson’s insights are most relevant for degrowth. According to him, the profound drift away from consumerism is required for a participatory system, and three elements might steer it: increasing awareness about the environmental and ‘quality of life’ costs of economic growth; mounting acknowledgement of the costs of political apathy in terms of concentration of corporate power, visible in the rise of neighborhood, community and workplace movement; and growing doubts about the ability of corporate capitalism to satisfy consumer expectations by means of economic growth and inequalities.

Both authors also bring to the fore the ‘liberty of the Ancients’ (paraphrasing Benjamin Constant), that is a view of democracy as self-government and direct democracy, and present a model in which both representation and direct democracy can be integrated. Democratization implies also the passage from political democracy to what Bobbio (1984a) calls ‘social democracy’, from the democratization of the state to the democratization of society. Indeed, as well explained by Bobbio (1984), a system of integral democracy can contain forms of representative as well as direct democracy, in a continuum where direct democracy – which he clarifies, includes delegation as different from representation (because of the so-called imperative mandate) – is the ‘ideal-limit’. Deriu (2012:559) similarly argues for “continuous regulated interaction” between citizens’ representatives through forms of co-management.

Deliberative models, on the other hand, particularly stress the construction of political identities as endogenous to the democratic process, whereby deliberation can be embedded and valorized by the method of consensus, and the decision-making process is important per

se and not just as the outcome of such process (Della Porta, 2013a). Social movements are thus key actors for building deliberative spaces and alternative public spheres, such as free spaces and enclaves free from institutional power (Dryzek, 2000; Mansbridge, 1996).

These visions of participatory, direct and deliberative democracy as highlighted above are quite important in degrowth literature. The first vision, similarly to Pateman and Macpherson, is conceived in its radical dimension foreseeing egalitarian components and participation beyond the strictly political dimension. It includes forms of economic democracy which Johansova and Wolf (2012:564) define as “a system of checks and balance on economic power and support for the right of citizens to actively participate in the economy regardless of social status, race, gender, etc”. Such a system can include a range of aspects, from regulation of market mechanisms and corporate activities and democratic money creation processes, to support for social enterprises, redistribution of income and capital assets, and reclamation of the commons and a diversity of production scales and modes (small scales, subsistence and self-employment). Indeed, workplace democracy and cooperatively structured enterprises would not be sufficient on their own to deal with limits to growth, nor to democratize the economy more widely, as they would be exposed to the competitive nature of markets, and highly vulnerable to risk of being co-opted by business as usual (ibid; Blauwhof, 2012). Some degrowth scholars (Bonaiuti, 2012a:533; Fotopoulos, 2010) side for a generalized system of direct democracy, following Murray Bookchin’s libertarian municipalism (1992a, 1992b), in which the state is replaced by a confederal network of municipal assemblies, and the corporate economy is reduced to ‘a truly political economy’ through ‘municipalization of the economy’.

Whilst a theorist of procedural democracy, Bobbio provides valuable reflections on the ‘broken promises’ of liberal democracy. One of these regards the persistence of oligarchies and the privatization of the public (1984a; 1984b). As he avowed in 1987: “We start to realize that the embrace of the democratic political system with capitalist economic system is at the same time vital and deadly, or better it is deadly besides being vital. In a time not distant from today we might have to revisit the ‘revisitors’”<sup>7</sup>.

These words, pronounced by a self-professed liberal socialist, are revealing of the gradual, unfolding escalation of neoliberal governmentality. Bobbio’s prophecy indeed proved correct, and more and more authors have questioned the degeneration of liberal democracy. With the

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<sup>7</sup> Introductory speech given at the conference organized by the Center of Political Science of Feltrinelli Foundation, held in Milan on 17 November 1987, on the work of Giovanni Sartori “Theory of democracy revisited”.

turn of the century and the escalation of neoliberalism, studies investigating the degeneration of democracy have been gradually increasing. Colin Crouch successfully coined the term ‘post-democracy’ (2005), which characterized with the following elements: growing public dissatisfaction with politics and politicians, producing complacency and apathy; public electoral debate as a tightly controlled spectacle; collusion of policymaking with corporate interests; increasing detachment of the poor from politics; personalization of electoral politics through mass political communication; undermining of the welfare state, which gradually denies universal rights of citizenship while the role of state as policeman and incarcerator returns to prominence; marginalization of trade unions; and increasing inequalities. In sum, while the form of democracy remains fully in place, politics and government are increasingly slipping back into the control of privileged elites in the manner characteristic of pre-democratic times, mortifying democracy’s pivotal principle of equality (ibid).

Della Porta (2013a) maintains that three main ‘shifts of power’ are challenging the liberal model of democracy: from parties and representative institutions to the executive; from the nation state to the international governmental organizations; and from the state to the market (hence from welfare state to warfare state). Indeed, while liberal democracy did not call for social justice, in its social-democratic variant it was based on the assumption that political rights guarantee civil equality, and that political power, claiming primacy over the dynamics of markets, can legitimately shape the distribution of economic resources (although not the other way round, see Offe (2012)). Hence social rights were historically established as logical consequence and complement of political democracy. The gradual degeneration of liberal democracy not only affects ‘social citizenship’ but also paves the way for a general challenge to the foundations of citizenship, hence fostering what Wendy Brown (2005) calls ‘de-democratization’ and what Dardot and Laval (2013) call ‘anti-democratism’. The balance between capitalism, democracy, well-being and social-security that was in place for several decades has for Deriu (2012) been broken on one hand by economic globalization, and on the other by systemic limits to economic growth. Liberal democracy, in both its liberal-pluralist and social-democratic variants is now in crisis, in both its analytical and normative aspects: now there is an ‘inverted asymmetry’ between market forces and political decision-making, or between private and public spheres, as the former are not anymore constrained by social rights and political interventions (Offe, 2012; Wood, 1995; Dardot and Laval, 2013).

Streeck (2013) similarly understands democratic capitalism as a conflict between two conflicting principles, one operating according to marginal productivity and ‘free play of



market forces', and the other based on social need or entitlement. This endemic conflict could be balanced as long as economic growth continued apace, but was exacerbated when growth began to falter in late 1960s, in a series of worsening sequential displacements up until the financial deregulation and burst of the financial crisis. In the present condition of 'capitalism-cum-endemic fiscal crisis', economic imperatives such as austerity-led economic growth set the agenda, leaving little space for those processes that supposedly constitute democracy, and democratic choice is preempted (Offe, 2012). What is lacking, is nevertheless a theory or a normative justification of the current model of post-democratic capitalism (Offe, 2012).

Crouch (2005:29) wonders what is going to fill the political vacuum left by the unmooring of democracy. Neoliberalism is "quietly undoing basic elements of democracy": vocabularies, principles of justice, political cultures, habits of citizenship, and above all, democratic imaginaries (Brown, 2015:17). Not only is it degrading democracy, being replaced by plutocracy, but neoliberal reason is creating its own criteria of validity and new practices of subjectivation (Dardot and Laval, 2013), converting the distinctly political character, meaning and operation of the constituent elements democracy into economic ones (Brown, 2015). Following Foucault, neoliberalism does not only signify economic policy, but also a distinctive mode of reason, a "conduct of conduct", a practice of "economizing" every dimension of human life (ibid). Justice, equality, liberty, inclusion, individual and popular sovereignty and the rule of law are hence transformed as they are economized, the citizen gives way to the entrepreneurial man, who is not only 'the sovereign consumer' but the subject to which society owes nothing, the one who "works more to earn more" (Dardot and Laval, 2013). The subject becomes human capital, who "does not have the standing of Kantian individuals, ends in themselves, intrinsically valuable (...) As human capital, the subject is at once in charge of itself, responsible for itself, yet an instrumentalizable and potentially dispensable element of the whole" (Brown, 2015: 37-38). The liberal democratic social contract is subverted and the very idea of a demos asserting its collective political sovereignty undone.

For Dardot and Laval (2013) this transformation nevertheless directly stems from liberal democracy's reduction of the original meaning of popular sovereignty to a set of procedures and ways of appointing rulers. As already identified by Macpherson's critique, the idea of 'liberal democracy' became thinkable only with the emergence of capitalist social property relations (Wood, 1995:234): "capitalism made possible the *redefinition* of democracy, its reduction to liberalism", the very condition that makes possible liberal democracy is

separation of an economic and political spheres, which from the start made it theoretically possible to invoke democracy in the defense of a curtailment of democratic rights (Wood, 1995). The freedom principle of liberal democracy is hence market freedom, and “we cannot really talk, or even *think*, about freedom *from* the market” (ibid:235). For Deriu (2012) the dependence of both economic and political institutions on growth can be traced to the historical link between business autonomy and the guarantee of civil rights. Nevertheless, while liberal democracy’s enmeshment with privileges and inequalities was masked through explicit formulations such as formal equality and freedom based in rights, its abstract formulations also constituted the material for a political imaginary, exceeding its precepts and enabling its emancipatory vision and radical democratic aspiration (Brown, 2015), constituting a platform for critiques of capitalist and market values. Neoliberalism, instead, with its economization of the political and increasing diffusion of the governance discourse, overrides the categories of both the demos and popular sovereignty, and vanquishes the capacity to limit capitalist production of value and market distribution (ibid; Deriu, 2012).

Going beyond the abstract formulations of liberal democracy, and its reduction to as a set of procedures would mean, as suggested by Bobbio, “to revisit the revisitors”, or “to lead democracy back to its roots” (Deriu, 2012:556), with a proper understanding of the radical dimension of democracy. Contrarily to a proceduralist definition, democracy is something more than a form of government. The normative ideal of democracy, popular sovereignty, is consubstantial to autonomy, although the latter is not intended in the liberal sense as the freedom to pursue and develop one’s own moral goals in life. Castoriadis’ philosophy develops a complex ontology of individual and collective autonomy where citizens choose and self-institute institutions and society. As a substantive conception of democracy, it differs from formal recognition of equality and procedural definitions of democracy, as autonomy entails positive freedom (instead of liberal negative freedom), which includes real participation to decision-making. Procedural democracy stems indeed for him “from the crisis of imaginary significations concerning the ends of collective life and aims to integrate this crisis by dissociating all discussion related to these ends of political regime (...) the profound link uniting this conception with what we call, quite pathetically, contemporary individualism, is patent” (Castoriadis, 1996:267).

Although intended differently, Eckersley also (2004) calls for thoroughly revisiting the concept of autonomy for advancing ecological democracy, whereby “the freedom of human and non human beings to unfold in their own ways and live according to their species life”.

Her vision of autonomy is charged with noninstrumental co-dependence in contrast to the liberal principle of autonomy as self-mastery that has “served to imperil the development of critical questioning in modern democracies in the new ecological age in ways that have ultimately imperiled autonomy” (Eckersley, 2004: 104). Democracy can thrive only through the recognition and the care of its links with the environment and the past and future generations (Deriu, 2012:56).

In the next section I will revise the literature on social movements, which are key to the evolution of a social-ecological transformation for degrowth.

### **1.2.2.2. Social movements**

Social movements have long been the main actors in bringing about the democratization of modern states (Tilly, 1995, 2004; Tarrow, 1994) and have always developed alternative conceptions of democracy (Della Porta, 2013a). With the escalation of neoliberal governmentality and the weakening of liberal democracy, the role of social movements such as the Occupy and Indignados’ movements practicing alternative conceptions of democracy has been depicted as increasingly important to addressing contemporary challenges for democracy (ibid).

In general, social movements have an important role in bringing about social change. Modern social movements and the discipline of sociology both emerged as a result of socio-historical changes in eighteenth-century Europe, challenging the status quo and the very notion of it having a transcendent foundation. The social world hence came to be seen as a social construction, and as such contestable (Buechler, 2000). In Alain Touraine’s view (1978) social movements become central actors in modern societies, and as such should be brought center stage also in sociology. His complex theory of historicity is centered on the notion of an intrinsically conflictive society, where conflicts determine social and material production and actors of civil society produce society.

What defines social movements is the quality of deliberate, conscious search for change with the related shared imagination of a future as a new way of behaving, fostering solidarity of partisans against a defined opposition (Gusfield, 1994). The task of movements is “to solve the practical puzzle of how microlevel agents can initiate and promote transformations in

macrolevel structures that both constrain and facilitate their efforts”, and they can be seen as “ongoing experiments that speak to central issues in sociological theory” (Buechler, 2000:17-18).

Social movement definitions are varied, displaying different shades of emphasis and focus. Some authors have focused on the rational and strategic character of movements (McCarthy and Zald, 1977), or on their political character as makers of claims with governments as claimants or objects of claims, developing the notion of ‘contentious politics’ (McAdam et al., 2001). Nevertheless, both the rational-strategic character of movements and the governmental and political character of claims as definitional of movements has been questioned by New Social Movement theory and the cultural turn of social movements more generally. Many contemporary movements struggle against more abstract targets such as racism or patriarchy and attempt to initiate social change by means of self-change (Crossley, 2002:5; Snow, 2004).

A rather different definition is provided by Eyerman and Jamison (2001:4) who define social movements as “temporary public spaces, as moments of collective creation that provide societies with ideas, identities, and even ideals”. While this is an interesting definition that emphasizes the creativity and cultural dimension of social movements, the term ‘public spaces’ has been criticized for its loose implications (Crossley, 2002:4). A step forward is made by Della Porta and Diani (2006:20-21) who especially focus on the networked character of movements, and define them as actors engaging in collective action which are a) involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents; b) are linked by dense informal networks and c) share a distinct collective identity. While this definition does not stress the (conscious) source of change embodied by social movements, and foregrounds the role of protest which is not always necessarily the case in social movements, it constructs a more complex representation of social movements. For the purposes of this work, another relevant definition is the one provided by Snow (2004:11) which defines social movements as “collective challenges to systems or structures of authority, or more concretely, as collectivities acting with some degree of organization (could be formal, hierarchical, networked etc) and continuity (more continuous than crowds or protest events but not institutionalized or routinized in the sense of being institutionally or organizationally calendarized) primarily outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging extant systems of authority, or resisting change in such systems, in the organization, society, culture or world order of which they are a part”. While this definition has the benefit of not being undergirded by a repertoire of protest, it somehow overshadows

the importance of shared beliefs, collective identity and solidarity. As highlighted by Snow (2013) and Crossley (2002), each conceptualization accents a particular dimension or aspect of social movements, but none of them can provide a complete picture of their complex phenomenon.

The history of social movement theory partially reflects societal and disciplinary trends, as well as mirroring the collective action of different periods (Buechler, 2000). Starting from the 1940s, classical collective behavior theorists (Blumer, 1946; Turner and Killian, 1957; Smelser, 1962) understood movements as paramount to crowds and mobs, and perceived collective action as a monolithic phenomenon characterized by unpredictability, irrationality, violence and emotionality, reacting to societal stress, strain or breakdown. They located the primary causation of collective action in individuals experiencing anxiety or discontent, and hence stressed its socio-psychological nature. Social movement actors were hence perceived as atomized individuals with grievances and easy to manipulate by propaganda (Zurcher and Snow, 1981; Goodwin et al., 2000).

Beginning with the civil rights movement in the 1950s, new forms of collective action spread to students, women and the anti-war movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The social, political and cultural changes of the 1960s brought a serious theoretical reexamination within sociology (towards for example neo-Marxian and neo-Weberian approaches returning a foregrounding role to power, domination and conflict issues), drifting apart from the functionalism that had dominated in the post-war period, and engendering the (soon to become) dominant paradigm of resource mobilization theory and in its rival theories of social constructionism and new social movement theory (Buechler, 2000). Resource mobilization (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Edwards and McCarthy, 2004) was based on rational choice perspectives, and conceived of participation as the result of an individual cost-benefit weighting of the implications stemming from such participation, following Mancur Olson's demonstration of the paradox of the free rider (1971). Concepts deriving from economics were used to qualify the actors participating in social movements: social movement entrepreneurs, social movement organizations, social movement industries etc. Resource mobilization scholars asked 'how' questions, dealing with the process of translating interests, values and ideas into collective action, and on the type of processes by which the resources necessary for collective action are mobilized (Goodwin et al., 2000; Goodwin et al., 2004; Jasper 1997; Della Porta and Diani, 2006). A political variant of the theory (Tilly, 1978; MacAdam, 1982; Tarrow, 1989; McAdam et al., 1996) instead focused on instrumental power

struggles among competing groups and on political opportunities and indigenous organization strength (McAdam, 1982). The structure of political opportunities (McAdam, 1982) and the cycle of protest concept (Tarrow, 1994, 1995) are often linked with the concept of 'repertoire of actions' developed by Charles Tilly (1978), which consists of the means a group of activists can use for making claims of different types. The resource mobilization/political process model has been criticized for oversimplifying the role of grievances, downplaying the role of values and cultural elements, as well as for overemphasizing the meso-dimension embodied in social movement organizations at the expense of the micro and macro levels (Mueller, 1992). The structure of political opportunities and the cycle of protest have instead been said to over rely on a structuralist perspective (Goodwin et al., 2000; Goodwin and Jasper, 2004).

These criticisms can be thought of as having brought about the so-called cultural turn of the 1980s. The framing perspective, together with social movement theory, has hence been concerned with the role of cultural representations in social conflicts, investigating the ways social problems are identified as potential objects of collective action, and collective identity developed, and focusing on the role of values and culture (Della Porta and Diani, 2006). Framing processes (Snow and Benford, 1988, 2000; Benford, 1993; Carroll and Ratner, 1996; Capek, 1993; Benford, 1997; Johnston and Aarelaid-Tart, 2000) indicate the interactive, collective ways that movements attribute meaning and significance to events and behaviors, facilitating mobilization. The concept of framing and its dimensions will be better explained in the methodological section as well as in the third chapter. For the moment suffice it to say that although the framing toolbox provides a set of concepts dealing with interpersonal interaction at the micro-and meso-levels, it has also been compounded with concepts dealing with the macrolevel, such as the concept of master frames, meaning the broad interpretation of reality during a period of concentrated social movements, that is a cycle of protests. In this vein for example, opposition to neoliberal globalization has operated for some observers as a master frame in the global justice movement (Della Porta and Diani, 2006). The framing perspective however has been criticized for its tendency to involve static or descriptive tendencies, failing to offer accounts of the generation and evolution of frames, or falling into reification (Benford, 1997; Benford and Snow, 2000; Goodwin and Jasper, 2004a). Also, frames have at times been treated as another type of resource, subject to strategic use by political entrepreneurs (for ex. in Snow et al. 1986; Gamson, 1992).

The second key perspective of the cultural turn is New Social Movements (NSM) theory. Notwithstanding the term, NSM theory does not imply widespread agreement among a range of theorists over a number of core assumptions (Buechler, 2013). The term emerged in Europe in the 1980s to indicate movements seen as ‘new’ in contrast to the more traditional, or ‘old’ working class movement. New movements in contrast are organized around gender, race, ethnicity, environmentalism, pacifism, human rights, youth, sexuality etc. What characterizes this perspective is an ensemble of interrelated ideas and arguments and a different approach to the study of social movements. New social movement theory, in comparison to the other perspectives offers a philosophical (Habermas), historical and speculative (for ex. Touraine, Castells, Melucci, Offe, and Cohen) ‘grand theory’ for the study of collective action, which links the emergence of new movements with the contemporary social changes of late modernity, advanced capitalism and post-industrialism. One of the central elements of difference with ‘old’ social movements is the development of ‘postmaterialist’ values, less centered on material satisfaction and more on the quality of life, and on the search for autonomy and democratization (Habermas, 1981; Johnston et al., 1994; Inglehart, 1990; Dalton et al., 1990). Other central elements of these movements are perceived to include the politicization of the everyday life engendering lifestyle politics and identity politics, the rejection of instrumental rationality, and decentralized forms of organization.

This perspective will also explained more thoroughly in the third chapter, as it will constitute the theoretical backdrop of the chapter’s work, together with the framing perspective. As explained at the beginning of the theoretical framework, in order to grasp a deeper understanding of the practices and imaginaries of the Indignados’ movement, I will integrate social movement theory with political ecology theory, articulated in its two variants, political ecology as ecologism, and urban political ecology.

### **1.2.2.3. Political ecology**

Political ecology can be thought of as comprising two variants. One includes political ecology à la française as a source of degrowth, and correspondent Anglo-Saxon literature on green political thought. The other is what Paulson (2014) termed the second variant of political ecology, relevant in this thesis for its component (‘urban political ecology’) dealing with the production of social-natures and space (see Figure 1).

### 1.2.2.3.1. *Écologie Politique & Ecologism*

The term “political ecology” was coined in 1957 by Bertran de Jouvenel (Whiteside, 2002), regarded as a predecessor to later political ecology theorists (Jacob 1995:208). Jouvenel shocked economists in the middle of the French postwar period by questioning the compatibility between a deep conception of well-being, and societies governed by “an ideology of growth” (Whiteside, 2002). He suggested that the growth ideology not only lead people to deploy their destructive power on nature, but could also endanger democracy. A wider conception of well-being should thus contain such goods as community attachment, spiritual commitment, and personal moderation, which require forging a “political ecology” overhanging political economy and economics (De Jouvenel, 1970, 1976). The term “political ecology” has been used by many authors as a synonym for “ecologism” and “green radical political thought” or “green radicalism” (Dryzek and Stevenson, 2011; Mitchell, 2006; Dobson, (1990 [2008])).

Ecologism was first distinguished from environmentalism by Gorz (1991: 171-172). He argued that while the latter only imposes new constraints to economic rationality developed by capitalism, without putting into question the bottom tendency of the system, ecologism implies a “change of paradigm”, questioning the reasoning of techniques, production and consumption. The ecological approach can be synthesized as “less but better”, and is aimed at reducing economic rationality and market exchanges for the benefit of societal and cultural goals at the service of individuals’ flourishing. Very similar to Gorz, Dobson (2008 [1990]), in one of the most widely referenced works on Anglo-Saxon green political thought, seems to retake (even though not citing him) Gorz’s distinction between “ecologism” and “environmentalism”. He asserts that while environmentalism argues for a managerial approach to environmental problems, as it is thought that their solution can be handled without fundamental changes in present values or patterns of production and consumption, ecologism maintains that a sustainable and fulfilling existence presupposes radical changes in the relationship with the non-human world and in the social and political realms. In this sense, ecologism is for him an ideology that questions mechanistic science and its technological consequences, and the desirability and sustainability of the post-industrial project of material affluence. Political ecology is economically radical and politically progressive, seeking fundamental reorientations, as unconstrained material growth cannot be reconciled with sustainability (Dryzek and Stevenson, 2011). The question of limits is thus important to



political ecologists, which advocate for radical changes in social habits and practices consonant with the belief that not only a reduction of consumption is required, but human needs are not best served by continual economic growth (Dobson, 2008 [1990]). Ecologism hence calls for an egalitarian, more frugal and less materialistic society. Environmentalism in this vein corresponds to what Martinez-Alier (2015) calls the “Gospel of Eco-Efficiency”, which is antagonistic to both degrowth and environmental justice and the environmentalism of the poor. Nevertheless, differently from degrowth authors, scholars writing from an ecologism or radical green perspective do not always question the sustainable development discourse (see for ex Dobson, 2006; Dobson and Valencia Sáiz, 2005).

In French political ecology, other important concepts from which degrowth draws are critiques of productivism, economism, or what Gorz call “economic rationality”. Conviviality, autonomy and solidarity are also stressed, and the foregrounding role of these concepts has been maintained in degrowth (Kallis et al, 2015). According to one of the foremost French political ecologists Alain Lipietz, productivism is “what ‘capitalism’ is to Marxists: a way of designating an adversary and a way of rallying greens around a single pole of analysis” (Whiteside, 2002: 36). Productivism is a social orientation toward ever-higher levels of material production, and consists of ideas and modes of organization such as political centralization, large scale enterprises, heightened division of labor, “mega-technological apparatus” and the “bureaucratic-industrial expertocracy” (Gorz, 1991:163, 104). Productivism is also linked to capitalism’s need for an ever-increasing consumption of goods, and the creation of “false needs” (Gorz, 1980). Both clearly connect with economism, what Gorz refers to as the increasingly expanding dominance of economic rationality typical of capitalism, that is of the logic of market and profit. Gorz’s concern is to reduce the realm of economic rationality, which for him constitutes the common ground between socialism and ecologism (Gorz, 1975 [1978]:26). A degrowth of economic rationality could occur to the benefit of the expansion of activities that are not ruled by the search for profit and gain and utility: many needs and goals are currently neglected and penalized because they fall under the domain of economic and “social utilitarian” criteria (Gorz, 1991:95).

In his work up to the 1980s, Gorz conceived the break with economic rationality by conceptualizing society as constituted by two distinct spheres. In the heteronomous sphere, central planning would have covered basic needs, and people would have worked at a reduced time because socially necessary work constituting the socialized sphere of necessity should be reduced at the minimum through efficient coordination and a central regulation organ (Gorz,

1980). The sphere of freedom should be fostered in the autonomous sphere, constituted both by private activity where people could develop their talents, interests and individual flourishing, and by an intermediate sphere where people would be organized in small, self-managed groups and communities engaged in artisanal, cultural activity and subsistence self-production (Gorz, 1991: 27). This sphere would include spaces of multiple association and cooperation, illustrating “the concrete possibility of reappropriation and self-organization of life in society through renovated forms of political, labour and cultural practice” (Gorz, 1991: 106). Autonomy, that is the sphere of self-determined needs and goals, would have to be steered by reduction of working time, which would have enable cooperative and associative self-production. In later works (Gorz, 1991; 2009) he ceases reference to the heteronomous sphere governed by criteria of economic efficiency, but still perceives autonomy in the work realm (through redistribution and reduction of working time, and later basic income) as having a pivotal role in the transition to a post-capitalist society:

*“The producer-industrial worker is substituted by the consumer-worker. Forced to sell all his time, all his life, he conceives money as what that can symbolically redeem everything. If we add to this that the working time, the lodging conditions, the urban environment constitute similar obstacles to the realization of individual faculties and social relationships, we can understand why the worker reduced to a commodity dreams anything but commodities”* (Gorz, 2009:126).

The norm of sufficiency (ibid:37) can only be established with work and production self-management, combined with the regulation and planning by state authorities, and the coordination between public, private, cooperative and municipal levels (ibid:47). Self-limitation of needs and the fostering of the value of sufficiency should hence be carried not only individually but as a social project (ibid:64) through democratic reorientation of economic development (Gorz, 1991:38): degrowth requires a different economy, lifestyle, culture and set of social relationships, where solidarity, mutual help and cooperation are dominant (Gorz, 2009:33). According to Gorz, political ecology makes ecological imperatives and necessary changes to consumption and production systems the lever of normatively desirable changes in social and life relationships. The defense of the environment and the reconstitution of the life-world are interdependent, and both require that life and the environment be subtracted from economism (Gorz, 2009:66).

The work of Gorz was deeply influenced by Ivan Illich, who similarly discussed development and economic growth (Latouche, 2011). For Illich, globalization contributes to the mutation

of *homo oeconomicus* into *homo miserabilis*, the indigent man (Illich, 1978). Development destroys vernacular frugality and produces needs that it is not able to satisfy. At the same time it creates what he calls “radical monopoly”, entailing the deprivation of people’s freedom to produce goods on their own and to exchange and share things outside of the market. Commodification of the vernacular sphere and of the life-world should be contrasted by deep changes of consumerist societies, fostering care relationships, voluntary simplicity and conviviality. Conviviality for him implies a society in which modern tools are used by everyone in an integrated and shared manner, without reliance on a body of specialists controlling those instruments (Deriu, 2015). Indeed Illich perceives autonomy as the power to control the use of resources and the satisfaction of needs, which is endangered by industrialization and development (Illich, 1973; Muraca, 2013).

If the work of Illich remains distant from attempts to sketch a project of an alternative society (Latouche, 2011:102), that of Castoriadis hinged upon the project of autonomy as an individual, but especially as a collective project. Castoriadis’ philosophical framework and conception of autonomy will be analysed deeply in the next chapter, but for the moment it is worth highlighting that, as already hinted in section 1.2.1, for Castoriadis the specificity of capitalism is that it puts economics and its needs as the focal point and supreme value in social life. The thrust towards unlimited extension of rational mastery, that is rationalization as an expanding movement of economic values, is for him the central imaginary signification of capitalism (Castoriadis, 2007:47-70), which was facilitated by the acceleration of “techno-science”, the consolidation of modern state, and the anthropological transformation towards *Homo Oeconomicus*. Hence the project of an autonomous society presupposes “the destruction of the economic as central (and in fact, unique) value” (Castoriadis, 1997:416). To him political ecology and the ecology movement go far beyond the question of autonomy in relation to a techno-productive system, since they engage potentially the entirety of political and social systems (Castoriadis, 1997: 247).

#### **1.2.2.3.1. (Urban) Political ecology**

In the previous section I have focused on what Paulson (2015) calls the first variant of political ecology, i.e. French *écologie politique*, and on Anglo-Saxon ecologism and radical green thought more broadly. While other Anglo-Saxon authors such as Dobson similarly refer

to political ecology as ecologism, political ecology is often used also to mean what Paulson calls “the second variant of political ecology”, prominent in the Anglophone literature and fields such as geography and anthropology. This variant could be defined as an approach combining human-environment interaction and ecology and political economy, with a heightened emphasis on the analysis of socioeconomic and spatial inequalities (Robbins, 2011; Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987). Hence political ecology combines political economy and ecology (ibid) and is informed by a normative perspective towards greater social and ecological justice. Indeed the continuous expansion of the ‘commodity frontiers’ – the locus where extraction geographically expands, colonizing new land in search for raw materials – associated with the increasing social metabolism of industrialized countries (Martinez-Alier et al. 2010) on one end point foregrounds the need for studying the distributional conflicts and the resistance of the ‘environmentalism of the poor’ caused by the disruption of nature and human livelihoods (Martinez-Alier, 2002). On another end point, it should lead us to question the ‘imperial mode of living’ (Brand and Wissen, 2012) at the base of those conflicts, that is the dominant patterns of production, distribution and consumption rooted in the everyday practices of the upper and middle classes of the global North (spreading also to parts the global South) that has become hegemonic and ‘capillary’ since the development of Fordism, and even more intensified through globalization (ibid). As these two end points are clearly connected, Martinez-Alier (2012, 2015) has called for an alliance between the degrowth movement and the environmental justice movement, or with the environmentalism of the poor.

Urban political ecology, drawing from a Marxist perspective, particularly investigates the interconnected economic, political, social and ecological processes that together form uneven urban landscapes, asking questions about the organization of processes and power relationships through which the environments get produced (Heynen et al., 2006). Transformative material practices are manifestations of symbolic meanings, desires and imaginaries (Harvey, 2006). Social relations are indeed always spatial and produce space (Lefebvre, 1991) and mappings of some sort, be they symbolic, figurative or material (Harvey, 1996). The social appropriation and transformation of the environment hence produces specific social natures that are the result of power relationships and cultural meanings (Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003). The idea of the production of nature starts from the premise that urban environments are the results of historical-geographical processes of the urbanization of nature. Environments are combined socio-ecological assemblages that are

spatially, temporally as well as socially and materially produced. Processes of socio-ecological change continuously generate new socio-ecological settings (Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003), and social movements can transform our cities into laboratories for radical experimentation (Loftus, 2012) and hence contribute to forging urban environments (Castells, 1983).

Indeed, following Harvey's (1996) injunction, theory should not be laid down onto the world of political practices without embedding it into the materialities of place, space and the environment. This thesis hence aims to investigate the political ecology of the Indignados' movement, that is the new social natures that the movement has produced, both cognitively and materially, as it imagines and enacts an alternative socioecological order.

To put it in Loftus' (2012) words, "urban interventions open up new conditions of possibility for alternative urban futures", and those practices should be conceived as inherently socio-natural. Reclaiming proper democratic public spaces built upon the embodiment of an egalibertarian social-ecological future that is immediately realizable, involves the production of new material and discursive socio-ecological spatialities within and through the existing spatialities of the existing order (Swyngedouw, 2009: 14). Their study, as dealt with by urban political ecology, together with tools provided by social movement studies, which allows a grasping of the Indignados' cognitive critique, is important for an understanding of the conditions of possibility for and trajectories of a degrowth social-ecological transformation and democracy conceptualization. Indeed, an in-depth case study research design can inform back theory in productive ways.

After having explained the research questions, I will turn to the methodological section.

### **1.2.3. Research questions**

The overall research questions for the wider thesis can be specified as:

1. How does a social movement claiming for 'real democracy' envisage and practice such democracy? What does this tell us about how a social-ecological transformation to degrowth may take place?
2. What is signified by the Indignados' movement? Why and how does the indignados' movement reconfigure space and nature?

3. Why should a deep democracy espouse degrowth? How and why do democracy and degrowth relate to one another? What theory of democracy is apt for a degrowth transition?

Chapter 2 will attempt to offer a theoretical answer to **question 3** by revisiting the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, taking as a focal point a controversy between two degrowth authors, Serge Latouche and Takis Fotopoulous, and shedding light on how democracy can be conceptualized in degrowth, if we follow a Castoriadian perspective. Chapter 3 will attempt to answer the same question through an empirical analysis of the cognitive dimension of the Indignados' movement.

Indeed, the empirical chapters (chapter 3 and 4) also aim to answer additional specific questions, which will feed into the research questions of the thesis more broadly.

The specific questions for chapter 3 are the following:

- How does the Indignados' movement frame the crisis and democracy?
- Why and how is degrowth connected to the Indignados' critique?
- What is the role of ideologies within the Indignados' movement?

The specific questions for chapter 4 are the following:

- How and why does the Indignados' movement transform space?
- What is being prefigured by the Indignados' spatialised practices?
- How does the Indignados' movement prefigure alternatives in its practice? How does the Indignados' movement envision social change?

Chapter 3 will answer **question 1** by focusing on the cognitive dimension (or cognitive social-natures) of the Indignados' movement, specifically, on how the Indignados' movement frames democracy and the crisis. It will also examine the empirical counterpart of question 3 by delving on the post-materialistic thesis of Inglehart through the lens of the Indignados' critique. Particularly it will analyse why in the middle of the economic crisis the Indignados' movement did not plead for resumed growth. The chapter also distinguishes between two factions of the movement, which envisage two different but interconnected strategies for social change. In the fourth chapter I will more particularly focus on one of these two factions, the autonomous splinter group, aiming to produce a deeper understanding of the way it imagines, prefigures and materializes social change (question 1) .

Chapter 4 will also concentrate on **question 2** through the new concept of ‘prefigurative territories’, explaining why space is entangled with the movement’s prefigurative politics, which will allow a better understanding of the production of new social natures engendered by the movement.

Chapter 3 has been published in the peer reviewed indexed journal *Environmental Values* (Asara et al., 2013). Chapter 4 is to be published in the indexed peer-reviewed journal *Environmental Policy and Governance* (Asara, forthcoming), and chapter 5 is a manuscript to be sent soon for publication. Also, part of this introduction (§1.2.1) will be part of the introductory article for the special feature “Socially Sustainable Degrowth as a Social-ecological transformation”, forthcoming in July 2015 (Asara et al., 2015).

### **1.3. Methodology**

This thesis uses a case study research design on the Indignados’ movement in Barcelona to investigate the above questions. Particularly it deals with the movement’s practices, visions, imaginaries and framing of the understandings of democracy and the crisis, and as such, it adopts a social constructionism ontology and an interpretivist epistemology. (Social) constructionism is an ontological and epistemological position that advances that the social world and its meaning is not external to us, but continually accomplished by social actors through interaction (Bryman, 2012), it also posits that theories are not a perfect reflection of it but can only offer partial understandings, or convenient ways to represent it (Della Porta and Keating, 2008). Interpretivism stresses how, differently from positivism, the subject matter of social sciences is fundamentally different from natural sciences and hence necessitates a different logic of research, which could also be called a ‘phenomenological logic’ (Watt, 2001), focusing on meanings and interpretation of the world given by the actors. In terms of research design this entails taking into account the subjectivity of the researcher, not breaking down cases into variables but considering their holistic, processual dimension, embedded in context. Rather than expecting explanations based on universal rules and causality, explanations are derived from the interpretation of peoples’ motives for action. A qualitative methodology is hence used, where research questions are worked inductively, and constantly evolve during the research, with continuous feedbacks between fieldwork and research design (Della Porta and Keating, 2008).

The case study approach is particularly apt for theory building or refinement, a goal set forth in this thesis. A case study is “an investigation and analysis of an instance or variant of some bounded social phenomenon that seek to generate a richly detailed and thick elaboration of the phenomenon studied through the use and triangulation of multiple methods or procedures that include but are not limited to qualitative techniques” (Snow and Trom, 2002:147). It is its real-life phenomenon that allows questions related to the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of social action to be answered. In cases the boundaries between the phenomenon of study and the context are not clearly defined, hence contextual conditions are also pertinent to the phenomenon of study (Yin, 2009). The ‘case’ is the focus of interest in its own right, which is studied longitudinally (over a period of time), and in an open-ended and flexible way, while a multi-perspectival approach is used in order to take into consideration different voices involved in the case (Snow and Trom, 2002). Finally, instead of allowing statistical generalization as in quantitative methodologies, the case study allows the researcher to engage in theoretical analysis, based on the quality of the theoretical reasoning and its being supported by the data, what Yin (2003) calls ‘analytic generalization’.

The case study of this thesis is an embedded case, meaning that it involves more than one unit of analysis within the same case study. This is specifically so in the prefigurative politics chapter, which focuses on five different cases, from the square to several projects born of or connected to the Indignados’ movement - also called 15M movement (or just 15M), from the 15 May first occupation in Plaza del Sol.<sup>8</sup> Following Yin’s (2009) typology, the case study analysed in this thesis is a revelatory case of a previously inaccessible phenomenon, showing what Snow and Trom (2002) also call a ‘synecdochical’ function: a holistic study of a specific case is used as a springboard, almost synecdochically, for gaining insight over the larger movement of which it is part (ibid). In this thesis, the Barcelona case study is analysed because it can allow a better understanding of certain dynamics and mechanisms of the Indignados movement in Spain and of the wider anti-austerity and Occupy movement. Moreover, it uses the movement as a revelatory case for understanding the possibilities or potentialities for a degrowth social transformation. Hence its analytic generalization is ‘doubled’ as compared to standard social movement studies, and theoretical insights over the movement’s political ecology are derived that are able to feed into wider theory on degrowth and democracy.

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<sup>8</sup> In the frame analysis chapter I also draw from fieldwork carried out in many different neighborhood assemblies and commissions, but these sub-units are not analysed separately or per se, and they were just different field sites within a holistic perspective.



The empirical research was conducted over a period of three years, from the start of the occupation of Plaza Catalunya in May 2011 to May 2014, but was grossly divided into two key phases. The first phase was conducted for the first 21-22 months (between May 2011 and spring 2013) and involved a gradual narrowing of the topic and objectives of the thesis research. During the occupation of the Square, I was intrigued by the creation by 15M of an urban garden on the site, and the presence of environmental issues in the debates held there, more specifically – but not limited to – in the Environmental Commission and in the Degrowth Commission. I was also very interested in the analysis of the type of democracy conceptualizations and practices emerging from the movement, while trying to grapple with the movement's main claims, dynamics, symbols and emotions. The fieldwork undertaken in this first period evolved and fed into the 'frame analysis' chapter.

The second phase of research is connected to the chapter on prefigurative politics chapter, which features the findings of different interviews and directed participant observation of different 'sub-units' of the movement. These observations focused on the practical projects that began to emerge from, or were connected to the 15M movement. Initially, this second phase overlapped with the first one, whereby fieldwork was carried out contemporaneously – beginning in the autumn of 2012 and lasting until May 2014. I carried out also a few interviews with participants of cases I finally decided to exclude as 'embedded cases' of the prefigurative politics chapter, such as Cooperativa Integral Catalana, Ateneu Popular 9 Barris, Ateneu Flor de Maig, Gracia Occupied Bank<sup>9</sup>. These interviews were nevertheless useful for unveiling the connections of these other cases to the cases analysed (which include the project Recreant Cruïlles, Ateneu Cooperatiu La Base, urban gardens and Can Batlló), exploring the way activists draw from each others' experience to establish a social movement space (Nicholls, 2009). From September 2013 to March 2013 I undertook a period of research at the European University Institute (Florence), but returned twice to Barcelona (each time for 2 weeks) to conduct interviews and attend the inauguration events of Ateneu La Base and Recreant Cruïlles.

Triangulation of methods involved participant observation, in-depth interviews, mini-focus groups, documents analysis, thematic analysis and frame analysis. I will now turn to each of these methods.

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<sup>9</sup> The motivation for excluding these projects were related, for the first two projects, to their weak connection to the 15M, and for the latter two cases to their feature being closer to more standard social centres, not focused very much on a proactive vision towards a transformational change.

### 1.3.1. Participant observation

Theory-driven participant observation was carried out for three years, although in a differentiated fashion. Participant observation is “research in which the researcher observes and to some degree participates in the action being studied, as the action is happening” (Lichterman, 2002), and its prime source of evidence is field notes. The researcher’s endeavour is to become ‘*part of the community*’ (Bray, 2008). Theory-driven participation aims to address a theory, requiring that the researcher comes to a field site informed by a theme, even a very general one. It is thus different from field-driven participant observation, where a given subject matter ‘in the field’ directs the goals of research (Lichterman, 2002). Theory-driven participant observation is inspired by Burawoy et al. (1991) and Burawoy’s (1998) extended case method, deemed able to “extract the general from the unique, to move from the ‘micro’ to the ‘macro’, and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory” (ibid:5). As explained above, the loose topics I was interested in when I came to the field site were degrowth/ecologism and democracy. Nevertheless, my participant observation was also field-driven in the sense that the general topic was very much wide and left almost complete freedom to use whatever research approach within social movement studies and beyond I found most relevant, while my research questions only emerged after several fields of fieldwork. Hardly any social movement researcher would come to a field site without any clue of even a general a research topic.

In the first phase I carried out intensive participant observation, attending Commission Assemblies (in the Square and beyond), General Assemblies, demonstrations, neighborhood assemblies, inter-commissions, inter-neighborhood coordination spaces, and meetings for organizing events such as the anniversary, reflection days meetings, and international gatherings<sup>10</sup>. Participant observation cases were chosen through stratified purposeful sampling (combining typical cases with major variations of situations), critical cases (understanding what was happening in those critical cases), opportunistic sampling (taking advantage of new opportunities during actual data collection), and theory based sampling (Quinn Patton, 2001).

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<sup>10</sup> International gatherings and events I attended to included the Indignados’/Occupy event “Agora99” in Madrid (November 2012) and in Rome (November 2013), the Tunis World Social Forum (March 2013) in which the Indignados’ and Occupy movements jointly organized a ‘global square’ activity, and the European alterglobalization event Florence 10+10 where Indignados’ and Occupy activists actively participated.

In the second phase I relaxed the intensity of participant observation, and visited several field sites from urban gardens to different projects focusing on ‘alternatives creation’, attending assemblies, and networking gatherings between these different projects. Considering both phases, I attended a total of more than 150 assemblies and meetings (including a dozen days of Square assemblies), each lasting from 2-3 hours to, in several cases (especially at events abroad or outside of Barcelona), a whole day<sup>11</sup>, comprising approximately 600 hours of participant observation.

Although all assemblies were open to the public, for approximately the first 6 months I assumed a covert researcher role, in order to access more ‘natural’ settings and interactions, after which I began to avow my researcher role when necessary. Participant observation (with limited *active* participation) was preferred to action research for its more detached position and for a desire to participate in as many assemblies and groups as possible. Indeed active participation implied in action research would have involved some work also beyond the assembly, participating actively in working groups, organizing practically activities etc – something which would have made it hard to participate in more than 2-3 groups.

### **1.3.2. Document analysis**

Documents and literature produced by the movement were also analysed. Documents included internal regimes documents, manifestos, minutes of meetings/assemblies, journals related or created by movement collectives, flyers disseminated during the square and at events or assemblies, websites of neighborhood assemblies, commissions, projects, blogs and other initiatives, an incredibly high number of e-mails received from tens of mailing lists (each neighbourhood assembly, commission or project has its own mailing list) to which I subscribed etc.

Non academic journals and newspapers were also consulted, for gathering comments and interpretation of the movement, more than for their source of informational potential. A

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<sup>11</sup> Several events and assemblies took from a whole to several days, to name just a few: the reflection weekend ‘Pensem el Moment’ (February 2012), the anniversaries of 15M, the Indignados/ Occupy event “Agora99” in Madrid (November 2012) and in Rome (November 2013), the Tunis World Social Forum (March 2013) in which the Indignados and Occupy movements jointly organized a ‘global square’ activity, several Sundays spent to organize the first anniversary of the movement, the event “Ciutat Comuna, barris cooperatiu” (April 2014), the European alterglobalization event Florence 10+10 where indignados and occupy activists actively participated.

comprehensive literature review also included the vast amount of literature produced on both the Indignados' and Occupy movements, from books to journal articles.

### **1.3.3. In-depth interviews and mini-focus groups**

Seven months after the Square occupation (December 2011), I began to carry out in-depth interviews, after having conducted three pilot interviews with friends involved in the square mobilization. The first interviews were unstructured, meaning I only had an aide-mémoire constituted of a few general topics I wanted to explore, but the interview was very much open-ended, and oriented towards a conversation (Blee and Taylor, 2002). Interviews gradually became closer to semi-structured interviews. However, I never made use of an interview guide with a list of questions, although I did have a list of topics.

At the beginning of the interview I explained the purpose and context of the research, roughly indicating that my doctoral thesis was focused on the Indignados' movement, without mentioning degrowth. Then I asked about the interviewee's first participation in the movement, how and why it happened (and whether they participated in other movements or political organization/associations in the past). From there I normally asked about historical accounts of their participation to the movement, and the most important events of the movement's development (oral history interviewing). Questions about the type of participation related to an inquiry over activities they were particularly involved in within their commission/assembly (particularly asking whether they got involved in the Inter-neighbourhood coordination space and the Minimal Demands Sub-Commission, the dynamics of which I was particularly interested in). They were also concerned with the dynamics and patterns of evolution of the movement, collectives that were exerting some influence over the movement, how they imagined the future of the movement, and how (if so) the movement changed them. Other important topics included: the conception and interpretation of the crisis (asking "for you what kind of crisis is this"); issues of ideologies, both at the personal and movement levels, including the supposed 'anti-systemic', anti-capitalist or anti-neoliberal character of the movement, their take on the distinction revolutionary/reformist within the movement, and whether ideologies (and which ones) were important in the movement); eventual links of the Indignados' movement with the alter-globalization and other movements; opinions on the (welfare) state, on the role of self-management, and on liberal

democracy (or, if they did not understand the term, I said “Western democracies such as Spain’s”); on their vision of a ‘real democracy’; and on consensus method and direct democracy within the movement.

I also investigated sources of information relied upon by movement members (what kind of alternative websites and journals etc) and whether they could recall the writings of authors on 15M that they particularly liked or agreed with. At the end of the interview I normally asked about whether they thought that the movement was also concerned with environmental issues, and solicited opinions on three topics: a) genetically modified organisms; b) nuclear energy<sup>12</sup>; c) economic growth and degrowth. These questions were for me important to understand the type of environmental radicalism of the movement. Nevertheless, I only asked about economic growth in cases where participants did not talk about degrowth when answering my query about the crisis, which surprisingly happened in few cases. At the end of the interview I asked demographic questions so that the close-ended format of these questions would not discourage open-ended discussion, reflection and type of relationship I wanted to foster.

Although these were topics that I raised in all interviews of this first phase of empirical research, I allowed the interview to drift towards other directions when the interviewee was keen on talking about other related topics that I perceived as interesting. I came to appreciate this open-ended feature in several instances during the analysis stage. Nevertheless, this in practice also meant that interviews (especially the first 15-20) were very long, between two and four hours. I had the impression that the interviewees were nevertheless enjoying the time spent, and I was careful in taking a short break when I sensed that that an interview had reached the three-hour mark.

I followed Blee and Taylor’s (2002) suggestion that interviewees be chosen in a deliberate sampling process, attempting to cover different kinds of activism and participation in different factions of the movement, in a sampling procedure guided by theoretical considerations and striving for completeness.

The second phase involved different interviews, on average shorter (between 30 minutes and 2 and a half hours), focus on the specific projects, namely on their organizational issues, space management, activities organized, historical accounts and relationships with the 15M, as well

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<sup>12</sup> I asked questions about genetically modified organisms and nuclear energy because at first I wanted to carry out a subsequent study on environmental discourses of the movement using Q methodology, and hence these questions were aimed at helping the design of the Q methodology questions. While in the end I decided not to carry out such a study, these questions nevertheless helped me to better understand the type of environmentalism of the movement.

as on the visions, purposes, values and motivations of the projects, their contacts with other related projects, and connected envisioned social transformations. In this phase the questions depended much on the type of project, so I did not have an aide mémoire, and these questions were generally not asked in the form of abstract questions such as ‘what is the purpose of such a project’, but by trying to naturally extrapolate and raise issues from interviewees’ narratives and discourses about the practical contents and history of the projects. These interviews always took place in the field site itself.

Finally, my field work also included mini-focus groups including from 3 to 6 people (four focus groups in the first phase and two in the second one), and comprised of people who were previously acquainted through shared membership in groups/assemblies/commissions. The focus group technique is a method of interviewing that involves normally at least 3-4 participants, where data are generated by interaction between group participants. It differs from group interviews or a collection of individual interviews because it usually focuses on specific themes explored in depth, and it emphasizes the ways in which individuals discuss a certain issue as members of a group rather than simply as individuals. Their interactions are hence important for the spontaneity involved, reflecting the (normative) social constructions and shared meanings of the groups (Finch and Lewis, 2002; Bryman, 2008), the construction of collective identity, collective action frames and emotional dynamics (Blee and Taylor, 2002). The role of the researcher is hence a hybrid between a moderator-facilitator and an interviewer, trying to remain as non-directive as possible but pacing the debate (Finch and Lewis, 2002).

In the first phase I conducted 37 interviews (of which 17 were women) and 4 focus groups, while in the second phase I carried out 37 interviews (of which 11 were women) and 2 focus groups. The list of interviews can be found in the Annex.

All interviews (except for two, one declining to be recorded, and the other being a pilot interview) and focus groups were recorded and transcribed, and later analysed through the software Atlas.ti. The data analysis procedure is explained in the following two sections.

### **1.3.4. Frame analysis**

Frame analysis is an approach developed specifically in social movement studies, originally inspired by the work of Erving Goffman (1974). Nevertheless, the idea of a frame as an interpretative script was developed in the direction of explaining collective action by David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford (Snow et al., 1986; Snow and Benford, 1988), looking at how ‘objects’ or ‘topics’ are framed by different actors, and meaning is crafted (Lindekilde, 2014). To put it in their words (Snow et al., 1986:464), frames are interpretative schemata “that enable participants to locate, perceive and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large”, or else they simplify and condense the “world out there” (Snow and Benford, 1992: 137). Frames are hence cognitive structures with content, and are both individual and social: they are an “individually held cognitive schema but is important in collective action only insofar as it is shared by enough individuals to channel their behaviours in shared and patterned ways” (Johnston, 2002:66). Frames are not static schemata, but cognitive processes, always in the making and evolving: although in order to study them, they require the artifice of being frozen at particular point(s) in time during the movement development, ideally framing analysis should involve longitudinal studies looking at the evolution of the movement’s framing processes (Johnston, 2002; Snow and Benford, 2000). Finally, frames are based on text, in the form of written documents, verbal behaviour such as transcribed interviews, and hence their evidence is based on what people say and do (Johnston, 2002), discovered through participant observation, interviews, speeches, slogans and focus groups. The latter are particularly useful for studying framing processes because participants in presence of their activist peers can easily reveal the workings of deep-seated thoughts processes behind what is called frame articulation, that is the connection of events, experiences, and strands of ideology so that they stick together in an integrated and meaningful fashion (Lindekilde, 2014).

There are three core framing tasks, diagnostic, prognostic and motivational. Diagnostic framing identifies a problem, including the attribution of blame and causality, and hence constitutes the target of movement’s actions. Prognostic framing advances partial solutions, including tactics and strategies. Both are oriented towards consensus mobilization, while motivational framing is geared towards action mobilization, issuing a call to arms and a rationale for action by supplying for example a sense of urgency, and emotional motives.

Frame analysis was coded inductively by applying thematic analysis and then grouping the many identified themes into the three framing tasks (diagnostic, prognostic and motivational). In the next section I will deal with thematic analysis.

### **1.3.5. Thematic analysis**

Themes can be defined as a category identified by the analyst that links expression found in texts, and relates to the analyst's research focus and questions while providing a basis for theoretical understanding of the analyst's data (Ryan and Bernard, 2003; Ritchie et al, 2003; Bryman, 2012). For both the prefigurative politics and frame analysis articles I analysed the transcribed interview texts by taking the following steps, typical of thematic analysis: a) identification of themes and subthemes; b) sorting or ordering the data so that themes are clustered into a manageable number and building hierarchies of themes; and c) linking themes into theoretical models (Ryan and Bernard, 2003; Ritchie et al., 2002; Spencer et al., 2002; Lewis and Ritchie, 2002).





## Chapter 2: Degrowth, Democracy and Autonomy

### 2.1. Introduction: Degrowth and Democracy.

The proposal of degrowth has entered with force academic, social and even political debates. There has been a recent surge of publications on degrowth (see Fournier, 2008; Kallis, 2011; Latouche, 2009; Martinez-Alier, 2009; Martinez-Alier, 2012; Martinez-Alier et al, 2010 and various contributions in Schneider et al, 2010, Cattaneo et al, 2012 and Saed, 2012) and three international conferences with hundreds of participants ([www.degrowth.org](http://www.degrowth.org)). Degrowth is a movement that mixes science and activism (Demaria et al, this issue) and in ecological economics has been defined as an equitable and welfare-enhancing downscaling of economic production and consumption (Schneider et al, 2010; Kallis, 2011). The underlying premise is that continuous economic growth is ecologically catastrophic, economically unsustainable (Kallis et al, 2009), and is no longer improving social welfare and happiness (Jackson, 2008).

Degrowth proponents are eager to associate the proposal with a deeper democracy, given a plausible drift of degrowth towards technocratic or eco-fascist variants due to its grounding on an impending ecological catastrophe that must be avoided at all costs (Romano, 2012). However there are few formulations or conceptualizations of the democracy perspective espoused by the degrowth paradigm. Although we value heterogeneity of voices and perspectives which enrich the debate (Deriu, 2009), many different claims and mottos have been launched and lumped together in the “cauldron of democracy”, and it is time to engage more seriously with differences and contradictions in different positions, if the degrowth proposal is to evolve. For example, different adjectives have been attached to democracy in relation to degrowth, such as “direct” or “inclusive” (Fotopoulos), “participatory” (Bayon et al., 2010, Latouche, 2009), “deliberative” (Ott, 2012), “real” (Romano, 2012), or “representative” (Cheynet, 2008; Fournier, 2008; Cochet, 2006; Decrop, 2006). We agree with Decrop (2006: 85, authors’ translation) that “the appeal for politics and democracy will remain pure invocation without a true return on the notion of democracy itself, on what it is in its essence”. A proper debate is indeed very relevant given what many authors agree is the contemporary democracy crisis (for example, see Crouch, 2004; Castoriadis, 2010a, Fotopoulos, 2005; Bobbio, 1984; Dalton, 2004; Macpherson, 1977). This article is a first attempt to address this literature gap. Towards this end, we go back to the intellectual roots of

the degrowth movement, and revisit the referent work of Cornelius Castoriadis. Castoriadis (1922-1997) had a fascinating life and intellectual history, including escaping Greece to Paris after the defeat of the Left in the Greek civil war and working for decades as an economist for OECD while participating with a pseudonym in the revolutionary collective “Socialism or Barbarism”. A truly trans-disciplinary scholar, he was trained in economics, psychoanalysis, politics and philosophy, elements of which he combined in his voluminous work. His work has constituted an important reference for many authors in the degrowth movement. In this article we argue that Castoriadis’ theoretical edifice offer a reasonable basis for linking degrowth and democracy and answering critical questions about the nature and scope of degrowth as a political project.

Our analysis of Castoriadis’ contribution is framed in conversation with the work and recent exchange between Serge Latouche, one of the most prominent exponents of degrowth, and Takis Fotopoulos, a “critical supporter of degrowth”<sup>13</sup> and founder of the concept of inclusive democracy. Their contrasting perspectives represent divergent opinions within the degrowth movement, roughly between what may be caricatured as a more reformist (Latouche) and a more revolutionary (Fotopoulos) path. Interestingly, while their views on democracy differ, they both frame their analysis in allegiance to Castoriadis’ theory. As we will argue, a careful reading of Castoriadis does not support either of the two interpretations, but instead provides a more sound basis for understanding a fecund possible relationship between democracy and degrowth.

Section 2 briefly presents the works of Fotopoulos and Latouche and discusses their exchange in the *Journal of Inclusive Democracy*<sup>14</sup>. Section 3 presents the key conceptual blocks of Castoriadis’ intellectual edifice, and section 4 revisits the debate under the light of Castoriadis’ philosophy. Section 5 concludes with the implications of Castoriadis’ theory for degrowth and democracy.

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<sup>13</sup> Although Fotopoulos is a sympathizer of degrowth, having written on the topic and contributing to the International Conference on Degrowth in Barcelona (see [http://www.barcelona.degrowth.org/uploads/media/Fotopoulos-democracy\\_en.pdf](http://www.barcelona.degrowth.org/uploads/media/Fotopoulos-democracy_en.pdf)), he has also expressed critical views on degrowth, maintaining that it alone is inadequate to deal with the multidimensional crisis (Fotopoulos, 2007, 2010). At the same time, Fotopoulos acknowledges that there are important similarities between the aims of inclusive democracy and degrowth, i.e. the “move away from the present growth economy and society” through localism and decentralization (ibid).

<sup>14</sup> This took place on the occasion of the review by Latouche of the book of Fotopoulos (2005), in the *International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, vol. 1 no. 3 (accessible online at <http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/>)

## **2.2. Contrasting views on democracy and degrowth: the Fotopoulos-Latouche debate**

### **2.2.1. Fotopoulos and the Inclusive Democracy proposal**

For Fotopoulos (2005) liberal Western societies are facing an inter-dependant economic, ecological, social and cultural crisis the roots of which are the uneven concentration of power, itself consequence of the non-democratic organization of society, institutionalized in the market system and representative democracy. Representative democracy and the market economy are for Fotopoulos two sides of the same coin, heteronomous modernity. Far from conceiving of economic freedom as an indispensable means toward the achievement of political freedom (Friedman, 1962) and far from linking economic development and democracy (Lipset, 1960), Fotopoulos argues that liberal democracies are the instrument through which the merchant (bourgeois) class managed to secure its interests against those of other classes through control of the emerging Nation-State. Given that the market system is growth-enhancing and given that the market system and representative democracy are interwoven and complementary, it follows that the degrowth transition would also be a transition out of liberal democracy (ibid). Nonetheless degrowth in Fotopoulos' view is only one aspect of a wider process of change (a likely outcome of inclusive democracy, see below).

Following Castoriadis, Fotopoulos perceives the crisis and the potential solutions to it in terms of a historical conflict between what he calls the “autonomy/democratic tradition” and the “heteronomy tradition”. The first is defined as the strive for “equal distribution of all forms of power, particularly political and economic power” (ibid: 3). Autonomy is related to the historical examples of ancient Athens, the French revolution, and the Paris or Spanish civil war communes. Heteronomy instead is associated with forms of “social organisation based on the concentration of power” (ibid: 3).

From this conceptualization of a conflict between autonomy and heteronomy follows Fotopoulos' proposal of inclusive democracy (ID). ID is a “liberatory project” involving the abolition of unequal distribution of political and economic power. The term “inclusive” refers to the inclusion of four forms of democracy: political, economic, social and ecological. For the political dimension, Fotopoulos proposes a future society of a “confederation of *demoi*, that is communities run on the basis of direct political democracy” (ibid: 7-8), which, geographically may encompass a town and the surrounding villages” (ibid: 205). Economic

democracy is necessary so that each citizen has the same resources and capacities to participate in the making of decisions. The means of production and distribution are to be collectively owned and directly controlled by the demos. Confederalism would assure a decentralization of horizontally interdependent and economically self-reliant *demoi*. Although Fotopoulos claims that “it is up to the citizens’ assemblies of the future to design the form an inclusive democracy will take”, he dwells on sketching out in details his economic model to “demonstrate that such a form of society is not only necessary (...), but feasible as well” (ibid: 221). Its main features are “a stateless, moneyless and marketless economy that precludes private accumulation of wealth and the institutionalisation of privileges for some sections of society. This will be implemented with a combination of democratic planning for basic needs and the substitution of money-based market exchange with a system of vouchers issued on a personal basis, conceived to securing freedom of choice.

In the social realm, democracy will be fostered thorough institutional arrangements, which level out hierarchical conditions in the household, workplace and elsewhere. The radical change brought about by ID is also expected to lead to changes in the human attitude towards nature (through for example the phasing out of the grow-or die dynamics and of hierarchical relations, and the localist character of the confederal democracy).

Fotopoulos argues that the ID transition should start by contesting local elections and replacing existing institutions with ID ones having in mind the universal vision proposed. Importantly, the project should be as inclusive as possible, bringing together the victims of the market economy and all those concerned about the destruction of the environment and the accelerating deterioration in the quality of life.

### **2.2.2. Latouche’s vision**

Like Fotopoulos, Latouche also sees a multi-dimensional crisis, at the heart of which is the failing “religion” of economic development. Like Fotopoulos, the concept of “autonomy” is central in Latouche’s analysis, so that “degrowth is a philosophy-founder of the project of an autonomous society” (Latouche, 2008b: 118) and “completes Castoriadis’ vision of an auto-instituted society” (Latouche, 2011: 132). Autonomy is understood in its etymological and strong sense (*auto* = self, *nomos* = law): an autonomous entity is one that “governs itself with its own laws”. This contrasts to governing by the allegedly natural laws of markets or the

diktats of modern techno-science and experts. Degrowth therefore for Latouche, meaning liberation from an externally-posed, not-to-be-questioned, objective of economic growth, is part and parcel of the movement towards autonomy. Latouche links Illich's emphasis on autonomy through frugality and conviviality and the Castoriadian ideas of self-limitation and *phronesis* (prudence) in the techno-scientific field.

Compared to Fotopoulos, Latouche makes more use of a second key Castoriadian idea: the social imaginary. His degrowth motto is to “decolonize the imaginary”, i.e. to exit from the social imaginary significations of “economism”, growth, development and consumerism. This is intended as renouncing “economic science as an independent and formalised discipline” and “re-embedding the economy within the social and ecological realms” (Latouche, 2011: 75 and Latouche, 2008: 111b). Latouche argues that autonomy and decolonization of the imaginary are intrinsically linked to each other: in order to gain autonomy we need to decolonize the imaginary through a profound *self-transformation*.

Latouche's vision is one of a society of “frugal abundance” (i.e. well-being as opposed to well-having), founded upon a self-limitation of needs. Latouche calls the envisioned degrowth society a “concrete utopia”, “a source of dream and hope” able to re-open the possibility for invention and creative imaginary, because “without the hypothesis of another possible world, there is no politics” (Latouche, 2008b: 43). To characterise it, he uses a schema of 8 Rs: re-evaluate, reconceptualise, restructure, re-localise, redistribute, reduce, reuse, recycle. Re-evaluation, re-localisation and reduction (of consumption), have a special status, the first representing the essence of the decolonisation of the imaginary, and the latter representing a recipe for “making better and more with less” (Latouche, 2008b: 74). Relocalization is envisioned at the level of bioregions, with environmental and social benefits, including more opportunities for democracy and participation in decisions. Compared to Fotopoulos, Latouche stresses the importance of cultural differences and calls for a pluriversal approach of a “democracy of cultures”: degrowth is not an alternative but a “matrix of alternatives”, a “pedagogic scheme rather than a political programme” (Latouche, 2009: 175-176; Latouche, 2011: 104).

Degrowth is then in Latouche's work about re-appropriating the political dimension, and creating opportunities for joint decisions of self-limitation, that are impossible under the current rule of the markets. Latouche remains sympathetic to representative democracy, despite its shortcomings, which he feels can be improved with injections of localization and

participatory democracy. Latouche's degrowth transition passes through a "quasi-electoral programme" (without a political party) made of a blueprint of concrete proposals including among others: cutback of the ecological footprint through a drastic reduction of intermediate consumption (transport, energy, advertisement), restoring peasant agriculture, distributing productivity gains into work-time reductions and increases in the number of jobs.

The transition programme of degrowth implies a true subversion of the existing order, and the conditions for its realization go hand-in-hand with the decolonization of the imaginary that it facilitates (Latouche, 2008b: 93). He also calls for the parallel development of alternative (non)economic spaces here and now, in the form of production-consumption cooperatives, subsistence oriented food gardens, collectives, self-organized systems of housing, education and health, etc, that can gradually grow and occupy a progressively larger part of society. Seemingly, he is also very favourably inclined towards ethnogenetic "exit" experiments, such as the Zapatistas. While on the one hand, the Nation-State remains Latouche's reference, on the other he advocates a bioregional re-organization and selective, collective "exits from the economy".

### **2.2.3. The debate between Latouche and Fotopoulos**

Latouche and Fotopoulos agree in much: they both see a multi-dimensional crisis with a strong ecological dimension and they both envisage a transition to a more localised and more democratic frugal society. On the occasion however of a review of Fotopoulos' book, and Latouche's (2005a) characterisation of the ID proposal as "refreshingly naïve" many of their differences emerged. Let us focus here on three differences that touch the heart of debates about degrowth and democracy: their views on direct democracy; their difference on the revolutionary character of the transition; and their disagreement on whether an alternative proposal has to be a universalist one.

In his review, Latouche questions whether there is the popular desire for direct democracy that Fotopoulos assumes, as the masses could be glad that someone "looks after their private affairs" (Latouche, 2005a). Furthermore, Latouche questions whether the "magic wand of direct democracy" will address economic inequalities and whether power structures can ever be fully eliminated (ibid). He argues that it is more democratic to be governed by elected representative officers than by demagogues that could assume power in a direct democracy

system because of the indifference of the majority to participation. His arguments against direct democracy and the Marxist myth of a “society transparent to itself” draw from a criticism of the “total citizen”, the Rousseauian individual called to participate from morning to evening to exert his duties of citizen, while instead it would be much better to leave spare time for leisure, conviviality, love and idleness (Latouche, 2009: 175). Representative democracy is according to Latouche, part of our tradition, hence it should not be abolished but improved with popular referendums, recallable officers, civil society initiatives and direct participation in some cases. Fotopoulos’ (2005b) response is that Latouche misses the multi-dimensional nature of the ID proposal. Fotopoulos, responding to an example mobilized by Latouche, argues that ancient Athens was an incomplete democracy because it addressed only political and not economic or social inequalities (see the role of women and slaves in Athenian society). Athenians could not wholly participate to the *ecclesia* not because of a lack of interest but due to the loss of income associated to participation. Being inclusive of the other democracy components, the ID proposal is one that aspires to fulfil the potential of direct democracy. True, says Fotopoulos, elites and demagogues could capture power in direct democracy when democratic consciousness is lacking; but in representative democracy the deprivation of the vast majority of the population of popular sovereignty is endemic and institutionalized into the system (ibid: 35).

Furthermore, for Fotopoulos a systemic change can never be achieved outside the main political and social arena, as a power base is needed in order to destroy power. Fotopoulos thinks it is naive to hope, as Latouche does, that degrowth somehow could emerge within parliamentary democracies, given their interdependence with capitalism, and given that capitalism has to grow or die. Latouche however is sceptical that the capitalist system can be confronted upfront and overthrown, to establish the revolutionary alternative regime that Fotopoulos proposes. Ascribing to an ethics of responsibility rather than conviction, Latouche argues that the search for good is not the search for absolute good but for the lesser evil and the task of political realism should be to contain evil within the horizon of good. Politics cannot be but reformist; if not, it will sink into terrorism. For Latouche this necessary pragmatism does not mean renouncing the objectives of the concrete utopia. Degrowth is a revolutionary proposal in that it challenges the dominant imaginary, but its electoral transition programme cannot be but reformist.

Latouche, an economic anthropologist, declares his uneasiness with universalist proposals for concrete utopias of the type put forward by Fotopoulos, which reveal “residuals of Western



ethnocentrism” (Latouche, 2005a: 5). To the perspective of a “world democracy” Latouche contrasts the “more realistic” proposal of local small democracies (*politie*) or “democracy of cultures”, which would aim not at the idea of a unified humanity, but at a “social trade” of a diversity of cultures (Latouche, 2009). Fotopoulos instead declares his aversion to the postmodernist relativism that has led to the rejection by most of the Left of any kind of universalist project for a radical social change and to what Castoriadis rightly called ‘generalized conformism’”. The market system and representative democracy being a materialisation of a universalist project, they require an alternative universalist project in order to be overthrown (Fotopoulos, 2005b: 36).

The two positions crystallise two different theoretical and political approaches to degrowth and democracy. The first (Latouche) calls for a gradual reformist transition to change first the imaginary, and then the system within, creating an improved and decentralized representative democracy in a pluriverse of cultures. The second (Fotopoulos) calls for a more direct confrontation of the system, and its universal replacement by a stateless and marketless confederation of *demos* on the basis of direct participation of all citizens. Interestingly, both Fotopoulos and Latouche allude to their intellectual heritage to Castoriadis’ work and mobilise his conceptual framework to structure their analyses. We now turn to an elaboration of this edifice, and then return to see what Fotopoulos and Latouche got right and what wrong from Castoriadis’ thought, reconceptualising hence the degrowth-democracy nexus from a Castoriadian perspective.

### **2.3. Castoriadis’ intellectual edifice**

Castoriadis’ long path of philosophical and political reflection, which started in the years of his involvement with *Socialism or Barbarism* brought him gradually to elaborate a unique and complex philosophy of humans, in a series of works starting in the 1960s. We can call it, with him, “the philosophy of creation” (Castoriadis, 1997b). It is not an easy task to summarize in brief Castoriadis’ theory, even more so for the non-philosopher reader of this journal. We will still attempt highlighting the key building blocks of Castoriadis’ theory as they relate to debates about degrowth and democracy. Our thesis is that both Fotopoulos and Latouche reduce the Castoriadian concept of autonomy, and its relation to democracy, in equal yet contrary, one to the other, ways. To understand why and how, we first have to delve into the meaning of the idea of autonomy and its relation to democracy in Castoriadis’ work.

### 2.3.1. Imaginary, Institution and Autonomy

Castoriadis' mature work developed as a profound critique of the ontology and logic of Hegelian idealism, of Kantian criticism, of Marxism and of the Heideggerian proposal of *Being and time*. Castoriadis nourished his theory with elements of psychoanalysis, social science, findings from the natural sciences and philosophical reflections in physics and mathematics. His *magnum opus*, "The Imaginary institution of society" (IIS) (Castoriadis, 1975), is a critique of the rationalist and determinist tradition (embodied mainly in the structuralism that was at the time of his writing in vogue). For Castoriadis, this was not able to grasp the profoundly creative dimension of humanity, expressed in its enormous imaginative capacity. Castoriadis argued that we humans are imaginative and social beings and we are led to continuously create our world, and constituting in this way what he called the *Social-historical*. The *Social-historical* is the human field, and for this reason the true anthropological and epistemological dimension within which philosophical, scientific or political research must ground itself. To analyse it, he used two ontological pillars: the *Radical Imaginary* (consisting of the *social imaginary* and the *radical imagination*) and the act of *Institution*, understood here not as in the everyday parlance of the term referring to administrative entities or laws, but as a movement of instituting-being instituted<sup>15</sup>.

For Castoriadis, the continual creation of Institution and the generation of social imaginary significations impose to reality an essential historicity that prevents it from closing itself up, or from fixing itself once and for all, on the base of presumed immutable laws. As Castoriadis (1975: 526) explains, central significations

*constitute that which, for a given society, brings into being the co-belonging of objects, acts and individuals which, in appearance, are most heterogeneous. They have no 'referent'; they institute a mode of being of things and of individuals, which relate to them. In themselves, they are not necessarily explicit for the society that institutes them. They are figured through the totality of the explicit institutions of society and the organization of the world as such and of the social world, which these institutions serve to instrument. They condition and orient social doing and representing, in and through which they continue as they are themselves altered.*

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<sup>15</sup> Oversimplifying from Castoriadis, we can understand the radical imaginary as the way human beings create their own World, through a continue process of emerging new meanings, thanks to imagination and social significations. We can understand Institution as the way we fix our disproportionate capacity to create new images and social meanings. This double process, which creates and fixes our imaginary World, is the movement of instituting-being instituted.

Significations are embodied in institutions, and they are not determined by them. Together with the unconscious representations of radical imagination, which are characterized by an associative logic non definable by any innate laws, they give meaning to the entire human existence. The meaning that we attribute to things or people cannot be grasped without significations and representations. But it is also not reducible to an explicit meaning, a simple word or concept. Reality in this sense is at the same time *magmatic* and *ensemblistic-identitarian*<sup>16</sup>, undetermined because it is determinable due to its openness to sheer creation<sup>17</sup>. The human creation of the Social-historical, the nature of significations and other anthropological characteristics, guarantee a continuous openness to novelty and human change that constitute the essential ground for autonomy, although institutions and society tend to be “almost necessarily” quite closed, as it is shown by the majority of societies during history, which are in fact instituted in heteronomy<sup>18</sup> (like religious, authoritarian and totalitarian societies). This iron closure of the sense of societies and of the rules of living together, thwart change and act as an impediment to the conscious questioning of institutions, which is required for autonomy.

Autonomy is a way to continue the movement for human emancipation; for Castoriadis this is a project, which socio-historically originated in Greece during the 4-5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. with the creation of philosophy, politics and democracy<sup>19</sup>. In other words, the quest for human freedom is a social creation that is historically traceable, one that dies, springs up again, surviving up to nowadays in new forms. The autonomy proposal therefore is not a proposal for a new utopia; it expresses the *germ* of explicit and limitless questioning which has continuously been with us creating new social-historic forms such as modern revolutions (American and French)<sup>20</sup>. The project of autonomy is a “social-historic proposal” drawn from the collective forms of autonomy born across time. Differently from Castoriadis’ concrete proposal for “autonomy” in the economic-political domain, which referred to workers’ self-

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<sup>16</sup> Castoriadis explains Ontology through two kinds of intertwined logics. The *ensemblistic-identitarian* logic is the basic logic of the living being, constituted of a simple set logic and the rudimental logic of mathematics. The magma’s logic is connected with the infinite and indefinite reality of representation, language, psyche, and social dimension. and it is connected to the creative aspect of existence.

<sup>17</sup> In order to understand the sense of the relation between indetermination and creation, see *Faire et à faire*, in Castoriadis (1997b: 18-19 and 67). On the twofold logic nature of human existence, see Castoriadis (1975).

<sup>18</sup> See the synthesis about autonomy and heteronomy as anthropological aspects for Castoriadis, in Profumi (2010: 121-134). See also Castoriadis (1999a:168-9) and Castoriadis (1986: 364-384).

<sup>19</sup> The Castoriadian project of autonomy is built on an idea of autonomy that is completely different than that one espoused by the liberal tradition, and especially from authors that have inspired neoliberal standpoints, such as Hayek (whose theories have been reworked by the “Chicago Boys”). If for Castoriadis autonomy is the fruit of the union of freedom and equality with regards to participation to social power, Hayek develops his analyses and proposals from the idea of negative freedom. The “freedom of and to” of Castoriadis is absolutely incompatible with the “freedom from” of Hayek.

<sup>20</sup> See Castoriadis (1996: 11-28); Castoriadis (1990:137-171); Castoriadis (2005: 17-26).

management<sup>21</sup>, in his philosophy with the word ‘autonomy’ Castoriadis refers to this wider and more complex human domain. Autonomy shapes in the last resort the twofold human reality, individual and collective, and is embodied historically in diverse *practical-poietic activities*, especially politics and psychoanalysis:

*Both the Greek politics and the kata ton orthon logon politics can be defined as the explicit collective activity intended to be clear-headed (reflexive and deliberative), that gives itself the object of the institution of society as it is (...). It is not about bothering the unconscious, the Es will never lend itself to it, and if it does, it would be a suicide, because it is precisely from the unconscious that everything originates. It is a question of not being a slave of the unconscious, that is of being able to stop the way through the expression or act, while being aware of the pulsions and desires that grow in there. It is this subjectivity that can be autonomous and it is this relation that is autonomy (...). What is a free, or autonomous society? It is a society that gives itself, effectively and reflexively, its own laws, while knowing that it is doing so<sup>22</sup>. Who is a free, autonomous individual, given that this is conceivable exclusively in a society where there are laws and power? It is an individual that recognizes in these laws and in this power his own laws and his own power – which, if we want to avoid mystifications, is only possible when there is the full effective possibility to participate to law making and to power wielding.<sup>23</sup>*

### **2.3.2. Democracy and revolution**

Democracy, for Castoriadis, has always meant direct democracy. At the period of *Socialism and Barbarism*, democracy was linked to the programme of the possible socialist revolution. It was understood as a system of soviets and councils that would overcome capitalist alienation, and return to humans the control over the products of their activity (Castoriadis (1979 : 77-79). During the Socialism and Barbarism period, Castoriadis considered democracy as a way for making revolution real: revolution as the expression of socialism. With the foundation of the philosophy of human creation, Castoriadis reversed this: revolution can only be the fruit of a political creation that institutes democracy as an autonomous society. Democracy is no longer simply seen as direct democracy in the narrower

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<sup>21</sup> Castoriadis (1979: 95-6); Castoriadis (1974: 388).

<sup>22</sup> Our emphasis.

<sup>23</sup> Castoriadis (1997b: 65 and 103-4) and Castoriadis (1990 : 204).

sense of workers' self-management but it's the self-organization of society: it is a social regime that institutes collective forms of direct participation in decision-making, and is capable of triggering a general educative process on the base of an effective internalization of the postulate of political equality<sup>24</sup>. As the Athenian democracy attests, democratic institutions are a complex network of spaces and moments, bearers of significations and values that organize participation of the community to public affairs (principally the *ecclesia*, the *agorà* and the *boulè*) allowing every citizen to have the same capability and responsibility to participate to the collective creation and to law making. For example, equality before the law, *isonomia*, was not only a political choice or a rule of the game in ancient Athens, but an institution that had been maintained thanks to an ethos that generalized and valued the freedom of speech (*isegoria*), the attribution of equal weight to citizens' voices in the assembly (*isopsèphia*) and the moral duty to talk frankly (*parrhèsia*) (Castoriadis, 1986 : 261-307). Hence democracy is the social regime where collective power is sovereign, and where citizens are aware that it is themselves who set the limits to their own power. Castoriadis continuously defines democracy as the "self-limitation regime" (Castoriadis, 1999a : 150). Democracy is not only an institutional model or a regime; it is an autonomous society itself. As any society, also the Athenian democracy instituted a type of human subject, a specific individual character who was bound up to its socio-economic structure, and supported the institutions that moulded him and reproduced him. The unique characteristics of a truly democratic society as compared to other societies stems from the capacity of the individual in it to question her/his own institutions and to participate to the creative force that brings the latter to life. This aspect, far from characterizing solely the Greek democratic *germ*, is for Castoriadis essentially what a true democracy should be (and not only how it was born).

But how should the autonomous, democratic society be and how could it emerge? In answering this question, Castoriadis interweaved different points of view. Referring to power, true democracy is characterized as the regime of politics, an activity whose end is to change society as a whole. Politics aims to change what is shareable in the social realm, so as to establish explicitly (and *reflexively* through deliberation) a new society/institution. For him, politics is to be understood in the strong and explicit sense of problematization of society's self-institution that was inaugurated by the Athenian form of direct democracy. Politics is quite different from "the political", which is understood as the social power which

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<sup>24</sup> Each institution has some explicit or implicit norms to be respected. Following the law we change our behaviour, and we internalize values. With the democratic praxis we interiorize the postulate of political equality, see for ex. C. Castoriadis, *La démocratie comme procédure et comme régime*, in Castoriadis (1996).

institutionalizes sanctioned norms. If the political is everything that concerns explicit power, politics is a movement of the whole society which democratizes power and makes each form of power collective, one in which everyone can participate in it. Three human spheres can be distinguished in society: the private *oikos*, the public/private *agorà*, and the public *ecclesia*. Castoriadis maintains that true democracy through genuine political praxis could establish for the first time in history a real public sphere<sup>25</sup>. At the same time, from the point of view of social organization, democracy should be the correct articulation of the three human spheres all together. The democracy to come should therefore be the expression of the collective elaboration of the Greek *germ* and of the universalization principle inherited from modernity:

*My conclusion is that we should go beyond the Greeks and the moderns. Our problem is to establish a true democracy in the contemporaneous conditions, to make of this universalization that stays formal or better, incomplete, a substantial and substantive universality in the modern world. (...). I say that humanity can do better, that it is capable of living in another state, the state of self-government. Its forms, under the conditions of the modern era, are of course to be found, or better: to be created. But the history of Western humanity, from Athens to the democratic and revolutionary modern movements, shows that such a creation is conceivable.*<sup>26</sup>

This perspective brings Castoriadis to fuse democratic society and revolution. 'The rebirth of the project of autonomy requires tremendous changes, a real earthquake, not in terms of physical violence but in terms of people's beliefs and behaviour. It involves a radical change in the representation of the world and of the place of human beings within the world. The representation of the world as the object of increasing mastery or as the backdrop for an anthroposphere must be destroyed' (Castoriadis, 1999a : 179)<sup>27</sup>.

It is in this context of revolutionary alternatives that Castoriadis refers to the ecological movement, and to the principles of frugality and self-limitation, central principles of the degrowth proposal today, as essential coordinates for thinking about the future of the project of autonomy<sup>28</sup>:

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid: 152-153 (see also Castoriadis (1996 : 159-182 and 221-241).

<sup>26</sup> Castoriadis (1996 : 174) and Castoriadis (1990 : 167). With regard to the collective creation as revolution to come, see Castoriadis (1996: 124).

<sup>27</sup> On the overlapping of revolution and democracy, see for ex. Castoriadis (1990 : 163 and 167). On the idea of revolution as a rapid change of the significations and central institutions, see Castoriadis (1999a: 133-4 and 139).

<sup>28</sup> See particularly Castoriadis and Cohn-Bendit (1981); *L'écologie contre les marchands* and *La force révolutionnaire de l'écologie*, in Castoriadis, (2005).

*Ecology is subversive in that it calls into question the capitalist imaginary that prevails everywhere. It rejects the central leitmotif according to which we are fated to constantly increase production and consumption. It shows the catastrophic impact of the capitalist logic on the natural environment and on people's lives. (...) Ecology is primarily political; it isn't 'scientific.' Science as such is unable to set its own limits or its ends. If we ask it for the most efficient or the most economical means of exterminating the global population, it can (and actually must!) furnish a scientific answer. (...) ecology isn't 'love of nature': it's the need for self-limitation (which is true freedom) of human beings with respect to the planet on which they happen to exist by chance, and which they are now destroying.<sup>29</sup>*

## **2.4. A Castoriadian critique of Latouche and Fotopoulos**

Both Latouche and Fotopoulos base their analyses and proposals on Castoriadis' theory, but each takes a partial view of it. Fotopoulos relegates autonomy to its power dimension and treats the social imaginary as an ideological factor. Latouche does not embrace the comprehensive radical meaning of autonomy, thus lingering on its wide-ranging implications for politics and institutions. The end result is that Fotopoulos' perspective on democracy has deficits, while Latouche's is a contradictory one. We articulate the critique along three lines - the social imaginary, pseudoconcrete utopia and *doxa*, and autonomy and politics – and along the way revisit the questions of revolution and universalism.

### **2.4.1. Social imaginary**

Fotopoulos reduces the interpretation of the social imaginary and disregards its intrinsic relation with institutions. The imaginary in Fotopoulos is a mere ideological factor, what he calls the subjective factor of the growth economy, the "growth ideology". For Castoriadis instead, the imaginary is the organizational centre of the entire society. The intimate source of a revolutionary movement is the collective creation of new social imaginary significations, embodied in new institutions, a point missed by Fotopoulos. The result is a harnessed and truncated democratic conception, relegated to an ensemble of specific institutions of direct

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<sup>29</sup> Castoriadis (2005: 237/244/248).

democracy.

Latouche on the other hand accepts that the imaginary is the core engine of society's structure and constitution, and criticizes the social and cultural sides of its current manifestation ("growth", "development"). But he too misconceives the unique relation between the imaginary and the institutions, i.e. that the latter are the material embodiment of the former. The imaginary is treated almost as a pure abstractness in Latouche who misses the point that alternative degrowth significations should be established with alternative institutions, thus positing a revolutionary change by compromises with forms of liberal/representative democracy.

#### **2.4.2. Pseudoconcrete utopia and doxa**

Fotopoulos mobilises Castoriadian terms (autonomy, growth ideology) to advance *his* ID society solution, but what he proposes is in Castoriadis' terms a "pseudoconcrete utopia". For Castoriadis, it is impossible to describe a pseudoconcrete utopia; not only what we know changes daily, but importantly, history is creation that cannot be foretold. Neither a programmatic-political proposal from a single citizen nor the construction of a societal utopian transformation from a philosophy of politics can represent an effective generalizable solution for a revolutionary movement. For Castoriadis only people can create and find solutions and these solutions are not foreseeable in advance (Castoriadis, 1979: 333). 'What political thought can do is to pose in clear terms the dilemma that confronts us today. It obviously cannot resolve that dilemma by itself. The dilemma can be resolved only by human collectivity' (Castoriadis, 1996: 148).

Latouche too depicts a pseudoconcrete utopia, although more open than Fotopoulos', with his proposed vicious circle of convivial utopia and the quasi-electoral program of transition.

Indeed Castoriadis never claimed that proposals should not be formulated: discussion and confrontation of different proposals is an essential component of the movement towards autonomy (Castoriadis, 1997: 413). But then, the nature and status of these proposals should be acknowledged for what they are, *doxai*, opinions equivalently valuable as anyone else's. They should not be considered as a universal political goal, as in Fotopoulos, or as a "pedagogic scheme" (Latouche, 2011, p, 104), a "bible" (of degrowth) (Latouche, 2008b: 8) or as the pre-conditions for the true (degrowth) path (ibid: 183).



This fallacy of univocity helps explain also Latouche's "paradoxical politics of degrowth" (Latouche, 2009: 172), according to which on the one hand "we need to institute again society" because 'the system is not reformable' (Latouche, 2009: 168 and 171), but on the other, since 'politics has to compromise with evil', then this revolutionary potential is compatible with political reformism. Based on this contradiction, Latouche maintains that an ecological democracy cannot be founded on direct democracy. This is a most un-Castoriadian stance, i.e. excluding *a priori* the possibility of direct democracy on the base of some (disputable) observations about the possibility of its generalization. Sustaining this position not only implies negating the self-creation characteristics of society, but also assumes that there is an order of human affairs linked to the order of the world – a unitary ontology – something which, according to Castoriadis (1997: 274), is a form a heteronomy that has plagued political philosophy from Plato through modern Liberalism and Marxism: 'If a full and certain knowledge (*episteme*) of the human domain were possible, politics would immediately come to an end, and democracy would be both impossible and absurd: democracy implies that all citizens have the possibility of attaining a correct *doxa* and that nobody possesses an *episteme* of things political' (ibid).

### **2.4.3. Autonomy and politics**

Fotopoulos largely omits the questioning dimension of democracy in the majority of his work, focusing solely on direct self-government. As a result he does not posit the project of autonomy as the fruit of collective reflection and creation, and falls into the fallacy of determinist rationalism (ibid: chapter 9, 12, pp. 8-9 and 4-5), which leads him to assert that his ID proposal is a pre-given conscious choice between two social possibilities in front of the crisis (p. 4). This determinist rationalism – defined by Castoriadis 1996: 131-135 as an "aberration" – prevents Fotopoulos from conceiving genuinely revolution as a collective creation.

Moreover, Fotopoulos reduces emancipation to its power dimension, accordingly distorting the original meaning of democracy. However his concept of power is unclear and is interchangeably used with "domination" seemingly meaning unequal concentration of power (Fotopoulos, 2005: 1-2 and chapter 13). According to Castoriadis, domination is the result of the naturalization of the instituted and of the corresponding a-problematic assumption of the

interiorization of social norms. Because of the reduction of the meanings of domination and emancipation, Fotopoulos' proposal is restricted to the economic-political domain and gives less emphasis to the wider problem of autonomy, not least the individual dimension of autonomy as a non-dominion relation with one's own unconscious and the peculiar role of radical imagination – the individual component of the radical imaginary.

Latouche understands better this dimension of autonomy but falls into contradictions and does not bring it to its full conclusion. For Castoriadis autonomy, when referred to a collectivity, is not just limited to making one's laws, as Latouche refers, but equally importantly implies the capacity to question laws continuously. It is an endless self-institution, which does not aim at a perfect society, but at the highest freedom and justice possible. Hence there is an intimate link with the concept of politics, which is a product of autonomy: politics is the explicit questioning activity regarding the desirable and best institutions, the discovery of the arbitrary nature of the *nomos* that opens up an unending discussion on justice. Politics in modern era has unfolded in revolutionary moments and is associated with direct democracy.

Note that even in a heteronomous society, in the last instance the law/institution is a creation of society. However in this case creation is imputed to an extra-social actor: God, History, Nature<sup>30</sup>, Reason. This occultation of our creative role secures the intangibility and perpetuity of institutions. Still, Castoriadis argues, a possibility for the rupture of the closure of meaning and signification exists since forms of direct democracy have been institutionalized in history – in Ancient Greece and in Western Europe - and there are in principle no impediments to the realization of a true democratic society – as autonomy is a germ - the only determining conditions being the social-historical. For Castoriadis, on the political level autonomy cannot be set aside from self-government. This precludes the possibility of the compromise Latouche makes: 'representation is a principle alien to democracy' (Castoriadis, 1997: 276). While Castoriadis accepts that there can be elections for (recallable) magistrates for functions that require a particular competency, he is adamant that 'there cannot be "experts" on political affairs (ibid: 277).

For Latouche (2011) the path to degrowth is positioned both as an ethics and as a route to happiness. However, happiness from a Castoriadian perspective is a strictly private affair, while the common good is necessarily related to the public domain: the end of politics is not

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<sup>30</sup> This position shows some parallelism with Latour's political philosophy of nature (Latour, 2004), who to the question "what is to be done with political ecology" answers that it suffices to bring the sciences into democracy. For Latour, Science has constituted a transcendent institution setting a limit to public life, and the "new constitution" he envisions entails that the deliberations of the collective must no longer be suspended or short-circuited by some definitive knowledge.

happiness, but individual and collective autonomy. Philosophy cannot determine a substantive common good: the latter is a result of a social and collective action, i.e. principally politics. This is not a relativist position, as there is one important component of substantive, non relative and democratic common good, which is the conception of autonomy as both an end and a guide. Politics is then the regime that tries to realise contemporaneously individual and collective autonomy and the common good as conceived by the collectivity. Ethics, like happiness, is exclusively part of individual activity, but at the same time cannot be conceived without politics, as politics overhangs ethics, although it does not suppress it, nor subsume it. For Castoriadis, in the last twenty years there has been a discursive return to ethics: in the worst cases ethics is a slogan, in the best cases it is a sign of the general malaise of Western societies, a crisis of values and of social imaginary significations, that leads to contemporary attempts to reject global visions of politics and to find in ethics criteria able to guide action and individual behaviour (Castoriadis, 1996: 249-266).

This has important implications for the debate on whether degrowth is a revolutionary and a universal project. Latouche refers many times to a cultural and social revolution, but given that he does not intend politics as an expression of social autonomy but as an expression of an ethics of responsibility, he divests it of the revolutionary potential and associates it instead with a “common good” of degrowth. He thereby ends up in the ambiguous if not contradictory position of a revolution being brought about by the slow movement of the decolonization of the growth imaginary, radical yet unfolded through reforms within a system inimical to such changes.

Concerning universalism, the project of autonomy is for Castoriadis universalizable in the forms, times and creative modalities of each society. Latouche’s (1995) “pluriversalism” grasps solely the relativist component of Castoriadis’ proposal about different forms and times, but neglects the emerging but still immature aspiration for universalism born with modern times. Castoriadis’ proposal is not universal in the sense of Fotopoulos’ proposal; it is the germ that is universal, not the final crop.

Importantly, if democracy is a “fragile regime”<sup>31</sup> – or better, tragic - it is not because the line between the two forms of submission – the servile and non servile one - is narrow, as Latouche argues, but because it is a regime which has to posit its laws without any external or supporting norms. Latouche’s call onto the abuses of direct democracy by demagogues and

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<sup>31</sup> See for ex. Castoriadis (2010b: 65) and Castoriadis (1997: 342).

social elites misses the point that democracy is in itself a regime of self-limitation, and therefore ‘the regime of historical risk – another way of saying that it is the regime of freedom – and a tragic regime: (...) Hubris exists where self-limitation is the only norm, where limits are transgressed which were nowhere defined. (...) There is no way of eliminating the risks of collective hubris. Nobody can protect humanity from folly or suicide’ (Castoriadis, 1997: 282).

Latouche is right about the myth of a society purely transparent to itself, but wrong to criticise direct democracy and Castoriadis on this, since it was Castoriadis himself that pointed to this fallacy in 1964-5 (Castoriadis, 1979: 328-329) and named it a “Marxist myth”. A society totally transparent to itself, that would discover, formulate and realize its collective will without having to pass through institutions is a “reverie”. First, the individuals that make it up can never be transparent to themselves, because of the very existence of the unconscious. Second, the social is an indefinite dimension, and there will always be a distance between society as instituting and what is, at every moment, instituted: this distance is one of the expressions of the creative nature of human beings (Castoriadis, 1975).

In conclusion, our revisiting of the Fotopoulos – Latouche debate from the theoretical perspective of their referent, Castoriadis, helps us understand better the meanings - and proposals - of autonomy and direct democracy and reach a better judgement on whether degrowth can be a political, universal and revolutionary project, and what this precisely means. In the final section, we synthesise the implications of Castoriadis’ thought and (re)think degrowth and democracy.

## **2.5. Conclusions**

What do we learn from Castoriadis’ work that is relevant to current debates about degrowth and democracy? First, for Castoriadis democracy is direct democracy. Remaining loyal to his perspective then we have to think the degrowth transition as part and parcel of the realization of direct democracy and the autonomous society. For Castoriadis, there is no compromise to be searched for between representative and direct democracy, nor is direct democracy reducible to a mere procedural mechanism for making decisions, e.g. Bayon et al. (2010). It refers to a broader social regime that institutes collective forms of decision-making, produces the subjects that internalize its values, and hence realizes the ideal of a free, autonomous society, i.e. a collectivity that consciously and reflexively decides and changes its institutions.

Second, from a Castoriadian perspective there is no revolution vs. reform dilemma: the path to the autonomous society (and to degrowth, if we assume that the two projects are interwoven) is necessarily revolutionary, but in his own terms of what revolution is. Revolution means fast and dramatic change to replace some central societal institutions and significations. A strategy of pragmatic reformism within representative democracy combined with selective “exits” and creations of new autonomous spaces outside the core of capitalist economies/societies, is not satisfactory, even if only as a transition strategy.

Third, from a Castoriadian perspective the end point of this revolution is not predefined. This differs from “universalizing” proposals that carve out well-defined, ideal (almost Platonic) eco-communitarian or libertarian societies that should be the ultimate result of a democratic degrowth transition. Castoriadis reminds us that we cannot and should not define what will be the outcome of collective creation, as praxis entails the individuals as the ultimate agents of the development of their autonomy. Of course, as individuals we can and should have opinions of what and how should change, and deposit them to the public debate; but this is very different from arguing at the conceptual level for “pseudo-concrete utopias”. A Castoriadian perspective urges us not to close *a priori* possibilities and hence to remain alert to possible openings and opportunities for a true revolutionary movement, and not to reject them in advance.

Fourth, if we are to think degrowth through the Castoriadian concept of autonomy, we should then consider it as a universal project, as for Castoriadis autonomy - with its correlative expression of direct democracy - is a universal reality, but in a different way than universalism is commonly understood. There is no political economic blueprint here to be universalized and implemented everywhere. There is the common germ, the general principle of autonomy and the ideal of direct democracy, that are to be cultivated and flourish differently in different places and times. This is an open-ended proposal on the one hand, but on the other restrictive on the principle of direct democracy.

Finally, one might note a possible tension between the essential open-endedness of the Castoriadian proposal and the ecological imperative at the heart of the degrowth proposal. To put it crudely: how can we be sure that a true, Castoriadian democracy will choose a frugal, degrowth mode? Although democracy is subject to *hubris* because self-limitation is its only norm, and although we cannot sketch the contours of an ideal democratic society because societies are open to the creativity of the social-historical, nonetheless the Castoriadian

democracy cannot have whatever content. The true open-endedness nature of the process regards society, and not democracy: Castoriadis' conception of democracy is substantive and not procedural, and cannot be disentangled from autonomy. The dominant values of the contemporary instituted society – such as the unlimited expansion of a pseudorational pseudomastery - are incompatible with those required by the institution of an autonomous society (Castoriadis, 1979: 418). In fact, 'an autonomous society does not imply only self-management, self-government, self-institution. It implies *another culture*, in the most profound sense of this term. It implies another way of life, other needs, other orientation for human life' (Castoriadis, 1997: 250). In this very sense the degrowth proposal is subversive, because like (political) ecology before it 'it calls into question the capitalist imaginary that prevails everywhere' (Castoriadis, 2010a: 194). One might argue that the degrowth movement is a rebirth of the original ecological movement, 'one of the movements that tend toward the autonomy of society' (Castoriadis, 1997: 246-247). Therefore even if we cannot posit that a true democracy will espouse degrowth, we are nevertheless able to find inspiring connections between a substantive conception of democracy and the call for the demolition of the capitalist hubris that is destroying the planet and society or the rejection of the 'unlimited mindless expansion of production' (Castoriadis, 2010a: 195), that poses the question of needs and opens up the creation of another culture:

*(An autonomous society) presupposes that the passion for democracy and for freedom, for public affairs, will take the place of distraction, cynicism, conformism, and the consumer race. In short it presupposes among other things that the economic cease to be the dominant or exclusive value. Let us put it more clearly still: the price to pay for liberty is the destruction of the economic as central (and in fact, unique) value (...) If things continue on their present course, this price will have to be paid anyway (...) If the rest of humanity is to escape from its unbearable poverty, and if humanity in its entirety wants to survive on this planet in a steady and sustainable state, it will have to accept a good pater familias management of the planet's resources, a radical check on technology and production, a frugal life." (Castoriadis, 1997: 416-417, our emphasis).*



# **Chapter 3: The Indignados as a socio-environmental movement.**

## **Framing the crisis and democracy**

### **3.1. Introduction**

If a socio-ecological transformation is to take place, this will be the result of democratic political processes in which social movements play a paramount role. Social movements are a lever of social change, as they contribute to cultural innovation and initiate institutional transformation (Melucci, 1989). In the words of Rochon (1998:7), crises are “what causes tidal forces to sweep periodically through the political system, disrupting long standing policy networks and widely accepted understandings of policy issues”. Crises shake our mental conception of the world and political subjectivities (Harvey, 2014), but they are not simply “exogenous events”: they are a matter of interpretation of reality, and social movements are the carriers of those interpretations (Rochon, 1998; Eyerman and Jamison, 1991).

Characterizations of the crisis that started since 2008 as “multi-dimensional crisis” or “multiple crises” are widespread. Many analysts have stressed the transformative character of the crisis, pointing out that the financial crisis mutated into an economic one, and from an economic crisis evolved into an institutional, political, cultural, and social crisis (Castells et al., 2012; Calhoun and Derluigan, 2011). The crisis is specific of deregulated global capitalism, with antecedents going back at least since the 1970s (Calhoun, 2011), but it is also “structural” and “systemic” (Castells et al., 2012; Bellamy Foster and McChesney, 2013; Wallerstein, 2011). Crises are essential to the reproduction of capitalism as instabilities are reshaped and re-engineered, but the sovereign debt crisis has been depicted as the ever more aggravating permutation of the “endemic and irreconcilable conflict” between capitalist markets and democratic politics (Streeck, 2011).

While the crisis of political representation has been verified empirically and it is a broader phenomenon spanning the last decades (Dalton, 2004; Pharr and Putnam, 2000), “post-democracy” (Crouch, 2004; Offe, 2012; Hardt and Negri, 2011) has been exacerbated in the current conjunction through, for ex., “rescue-cum-retrenchment” programs (Scharpf, 2011). The crisis includes for other analysts also an ecological dimension, stemming from an aggravation and extension of the process of disembedding as part of the Polanyian ‘great



transformation' (Altvater and Mahnkopf, 1997; Fraser, 2012), and of the negative effects of growth societies, as pointed out by the degrowth movement (Martinez-Alier et al., 2010; Schneider et al., 2010).

In the “polysemic context of a saturated discursive space about the crisis” (Castells et al., 2012: 57), this article aims to analyse a wide social movement that emerged under the thrust of the crisis. The *Indignados* movement has featured the largest occupations of Spanish squares since the transition to democracy in the 70s, while enjoying support from the wider population of over 70% (Metroscopia, 2011). The Tunisian, Egyptian and Icelandic revolutions represented major sources of inspiration for the movement (Glasius and Pleyers, 2013; Castells, 2012), which in turn acted as a springboard for “indignant” or Occupy mobilisations from Portugal and Greece to the United Kingdom, United States and Israel<sup>32</sup>. Some authors (ibid; Tejerina et al., 2013) have identified a global cycle of contention, sharing the symbolic dimension of “square politics” (Castells, 2012: 135; Benski et al, 2013; Maria Antentas and Vivas, 2012), demands and values such as democracy, social justice and dignity (Glasius and Pleyers, 2013), directed against social and economic inequalities (Tejerina et al., 2012).

This article aims to contribute to the burgeoning literature on the recent wave of protests by shedding light on the cognitive dimension of the *Indignados* movement, through the study of framing processes and collective identity. Specifically, it intends to analyse the interpretation of the crisis, the visions put forward and the conceptualizations of “real democracy” advanced by participants in the *Indignados* movement. It finds that the movement was not just a reaction to austerity policies, but gave an alternative meaning to the crisis (Glasius and Pleyers, 2012) and put forward an integrated critique to contemporary societies, a meta-political critique.

This article delves into a completely neglected issue in the literature on the latest cycle of protest: the role of the environmental critique within the movement. Situating itself within the debate on New Social Movement (NSM) theory, it identifies its limitations and challenges, shedding light particularly on two issues. On the one hand, the role of ideology within the movement and their relationship with frames. On the other, whether the movement is bearer of materialistic or post-materialistic values, and whether such a distinction makes any sense. In this direction, another question it aims to answer is why, in the midst of what is considered

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<sup>32</sup> The inspirational element from the Arab Spring and Iceland has been explicitly acknowledged through the interviews.

to be the greatest economic crisis since the 1930s, the movement did not plead for resumed growth.

Having briefly introduced the composite theoretical framework and the methodology, the fourth section contains a historical excursus over the development of the movement in Barcelona, especially focusing on the square occupation period. In the fifth section I proceed with the framing analysis. Implications of the two theoretical debates on ideologies and values are discussed, before conclusions are drawn.

### **3.2. The cultural turn and the cognitive praxis**

Having been marginalised for twenty years by the resource mobilisation paradigm, grievances and ideologies received renewed attention with the cultural turn in social movement studies. NSM theory perceived “new movements” – a cluster of movements that began to emerge out of the students movement of the 60s, and which included the environmental, peace and second-wave feminism movements (Crossley, 2002) - as products of postindustrial society, which transcend class as the main social cleavage. NSMs focus on cultural and symbolic concerns linked to issues of identity and everyday life, post-materialist values like autonomy and self-expression, and use decentralized organization and radical mobilization tactics, intimately linked to the credibility crisis of conventional participation channels of Western democracies (Johnston et al, 1994). These features were thought antithetical to the “old” labour movement, focused on political conflict and “materialistic values” such as social rights, redistribution, and the stimulation of economic growth (Offe, 1985; Johnston et al., 1994; Cohen, 1983; Inglehart, 1990; Habermas, 1981). Critiques of historical misrepresentation aside (Calhoun, 1993), NSM theory is deemed to represent a paradigm shift from class and economic reductionism to culture, focusing on the neglected question of “why” movements emerge (as opposed to the “how” of Resource Mobilization and Political Process theories) (Melucci, 1985; Buechler, 1995), which enabled, to bridge micro (individual motivations) and macro dimensions (macrostructural models) (Crossley, 2002; Calhoun, 1993). The concept of collective identity facilitated this bridging (Melucci, 1989; 1995). Collective identity is developed interactively through connections within a group concerning three interwoven levels: a cognitive and moral framework, relational and emotional investments (ibid; Polletta

and Jasper, 2001). It requires the construction of a “multipolar action system” (Melucci, 1989) in which the collective “we” is negotiated through evolving tensions within movements.

This paper focuses on the social/cultural construction of meaning by looking at framing through the prism of collective identity and the evolution of “action in action” (Melucci, 1995:60, 1989) so as to avoid the reductionist bias towards the psychological (individual) level of which framing has been charged (Buechler, 2000; Benford, 1997; Benford and Snow, 2000).

The social constructionist concept of framing, borrowed from Goffman (1974), conceives movements as signifying agents actively involved in the “politics of signification” also involving media, local governments and the state (Snow and Benford, 1988). Framing processes are “schemata of interpretations” that act by focusing attention on what is relevant, articulating mechanisms and perceptions so that a narrative about facts is created or reconstituted, like when unfortunate but tolerable social conditions are transformed into mobilising grievances and injustices (Snow, 2013). Framing tasks involve: 1) a diagnosis of some aspect of social life as problematic and in need of alteration, thus creating a responsibility; 2) a proposed solution to the diagnosed problem, hypothesising new social patterns; and 3) a call to arms or rationale for engaging in corrective action (Snow and Benford, 1988:199).

Despite the popularity of the approach, several limitations and failures have been noted. From an interpretive/constructionist tradition, framing’s emphasis shifted to strategic textual artefacts (Westby 2002), pushing beliefs and values to the periphery of the approach (Gillan, 2008). The concept of frame alignment for example was intended to link the strategic efforts of social movement actors with the interests of prospective adherents, dichotomising cultural and strategic orientation to action (Polletta, 1997). Ideologies and frames are both cultural products that help interpreting social and political phenomena (Gillan, 2008), but Snow and colleagues have been accused of using frames as a substitute for ideology (Oliver and Johnston, 2000; Buechler, 2000; Melucci, 1996:349) and of characterising ideology as an accomplishment of framing processes (for ex, in Hunt et al. 1994:191). While Benford and Snow (2000) construed ideologies as both constraint and resource in relation to framing processes (Snow and Benford, 2000), subsequent work has tried to better define the differences and relationships between the two concepts, but still there remains a degree of confusion. Steinberg (1998) depicts frames as outer boundaries within which ideological

processes of mobilisation vie for hegemonic control. Gillan (2008) points out that ideologies may contain many of the ingredients of specific frames, whereas Westby (2002) conceives ideologies as one component of frames, together with the “strategic imperative”.

In order to address critiques of framing as “decontextualised and disembodied” (Buechler, 2000) for their failure to grasp the ideology dimension, this paper examines and clarifies their relationships, by looking directly at the empirical case of the Indignados movement. This is even more compelling, given that new social movements have been depicted in some cases as “post-ideological” (Kuechler and Dalton, 1990; Offe, 1990).

### **3.3. Methodology**

In this article the Indignados movement is analysed dynamically in its process of framing construction and evolution, through the identification of transformative events. Transformative events are “turning points in structural change, concentrated moments of political and cultural activity” in which “very brief, spatially concentrated, and relatively chaotic sequences of action can have durable, spatially extended, and profoundly structural effects” (McAdam and Sewell, 2001:102). As pointed out by Snow (2013:474), “little research has examined systematically the discursive processes through which frames evolve, develop, and change”, hence the concept of transformative events, coupled with that of collective identity, is here instructive.

The analysis is based on two years of intensive field work on the Indignados movement in Barcelona. Participant observation was conducted from the start of the encampments in Plaza Catalunya through the subsequent decentralising evolution of the movement. This comprised attendance of neighbourhood assemblies, thematic commissions meetings, “inter-neighbourhood coordination spaces”, demonstrations and international gatherings such as Agora99. Although all the assemblies were open to the public, a covert research role was assumed for the first seven months in order to access “natural” settings and interactions, after which I started to avow my research role, when necessary. Participant observation (with limited *active* participation) was preferred to action research for its more detached position and for a desire to participate in as many assemblies and groups as possible.

Inextricably linked to discourse, frames are examined through thematic analysis of the transcripts of 37 in-depth unstructured and semi-structured interviews and 4 mini-focus groups, conducted between January 2012 and Spring 2013, and covering participants' accounts of participation as well as open reflection upon movement dynamics and debates (Johnston, 1995; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Participant observation cases have been chosen through stratified purposeful sampling, critical cases, opportunistic sampling, and theoretical sampling. Documents, websites, emails, flyers and literature produced by the movement were also analysed.

### **3.4. Historical excursus: framing through transformative events**

In Spain, the economic crisis translated into about 500.000 evicted families between 2007 and 2011, and an unemployment rate of 22%, and 47% among youngsters (February 2011). The worldwide financial crisis was compounded with the bursting of the real estate bubble, and the implosion of the associated lending market which led to the bailing out of vulnerable banks. After having first denied that the Spanish economy was in trouble, President Zapatero started to pass adjustment and austerity policies, which hit severely lower and middle classes (OM, 2011). In September 2010 a general strike against the new labour reform evolved unexpectedly into the occupation of the old seat of the Spanish Bank in Plaza Catalunya. Since the end of 2010, mobilizations against the Sinde Law on Internet regulation, a general strike called by university students, a demonstration organised in Madrid by the Platform "Youth without Future", and the surge of new initiatives such as "Do not vote for them" and "State of Malaise" have marked the advent of a different political climate. In these months a new platform "Real Democracy Now" (RDN), constituted of disparate individuals and collectives from various cities, published a manifesto on Facebook and called for a demonstration on 15 May 2011, one week before the national elections, with the slogan "Real Democracy Now. We are not merchandise in the hands of politicians and bankers". In the manifesto the activists declared outrage at the "dictates of big economic powers", party dictatorship, the dominance of economism (i.e. "placing money above human beings"), social injustices and the corruption of politicians. Their call for an ethical revolution, successfully brought to the streets tens of thousands of people in more than 70 cities of Spain. Following encampments in Puerta del Sol in Madrid after the demonstration and their attempted eviction, occupations spread to more than 800 cities around the world. For some without a

background in political activism, the videos and manifesto of RDN denouncing a *de facto* non democratic system caused a “frame transformation” involving a change in prior understandings and perspectives (Snow, 2013). The following excerpt is from an interview with a 30-year-old woman from the Outraged University Commission (I5:14):

*‘I had watched the videos of RDN when the demonstration was being prepared, (...) and, clearly now things have much changed and everyone uses and talks about concepts such as democracy in a different way, or at least in a way that before I wasn’t used to. I explain. For me the fact that in the videos there were girls saying “this is not a democracy, the real democracy...”, for me it was like... before I didn’t think about it, but I understood immediately the message and indeed I thought that they were very brave and that for me it was true’.*

The movement came to be known both as “Indignados”, from the famous pamphlet of Stephane Hessel (“Indignez-vous!”) and as “15M”, after the day of the first demonstrations. In Plaza Catalunya, where tens of thousands of people gathered, the atmosphere was charged with much energy, solidarity, excitement, and illusion that real change was imminent. The RDN “frame makers” soon lost the control of developments, as is evident from a 35-year-old male RDN activist’s words:

*‘We felt that something was changing, that a new social movement had been generated, and that we were completely internal to it, without knowing what it was about. There was the sensation that we could not make this thing ours, because it was something completely explosive’ (I24:483).*

The demonstration and the following occupations were new in eschewing banners of organisations, labor unions, political parties, and they were using a language which appealed to citizens beyond any political spectrum: “*We are ordinary people. We are like you (..) Some of us consider ourselves progressive, others conservative (..) Some of us have clearly defined ideologies, others are apolitical*” (RDN manifesto). The 15M movement occurred in a climate of distrust not only of political parties but also of major labor unions. One of the main slogans was “no-one represents us”.

The mobilisation in the square gradually forged a new collective identity through what I would call the “political identity divesting” process, the implicit requirement of each participant to enter the square as a “bare” person, leaving aside one’s own ideological stance to create something anew, as this excerpt from a 26-year-old woman from the Degrowth Sub-Commission exemplified:

*‘What is happening is that politicians and bankers are making fun of us and we have to learn to find a way to counteract this power. So it is not a question of “what my tag is”, (...) the important thing is that they are screwing us’ (I13:407).*

Even people who belonged to political organisations or labour unions were expected to participate unaffiliated, leaving behind ulterior political motives. Some participants commented in the square: *“I come here not as a labor unionist of X, but as a person, as a participant to this assembly”*. The 15M also raised expectations of creating new political ideals, as a 60-year-old man from the Sants neighbourhood assembly unveiled:

*‘It was the idea of starting it all again, no? (...) I thought that it was about leaving aside all the “isms”, all of them: communism, Marxism, socialism, Trotskyism, anarchism (...) and start once again with some ideals like “anti-capitalist”, “they don’t represent us” and assemblies, start it all over again. And I liked it.’ (I23:183).*

This “anonymous encountering space” seemed to “strengthen brotherhood, and the confluences of many” (I19:440). The “political identity divesting” process is very specific to the 15M movement and stemmed at least in part from the crisis of representation (I33:950):

*‘for me what makes sense is all the concepts that deal with “uniting”, rather than ideology (...). You have to participate yourself, there is no-one behind you telling you “you should arrive here”, no’ (30-year-old woman of the Outraged University Commission, I5:429).*

In a few days Plaza Catalunya turned into a “free space”<sup>33</sup>, with myriads of different activities going on, and the formation of the first commissions, linked to the more strictly logistic and material functions of the square. The centre of the square was composed of three artificial areas, Tahrir, Iceland and Palestine and around it were the different commissions and a brand-new urban garden. The acampada (i.e. square encampments) experienced a rapid and exponential increase in “complexification”, with a proliferation of commissions, subcommissions, neighbourhood assemblies, and very long General Assemblies (GA’s) late in the evening. These followed the global justice movement format (Maeckelbergh, 2012) as the transparent and accessible, decision-making body, moderated by the rotating “facilitation flotilla”, a diverse team from social centres and squatting backgrounds with assembly-facilitation experience. During assemblies, decisions affecting the whole square were taken usually by (not necessarily full) consensus, resorting to voting by hand when consensus was

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<sup>33</sup> A free space is a site removed from the direct control of dominant groups in which counter-hegemonic identities and visions are developed (Polletta, 1999).

difficult to reach. This happened for example with the difficult decision (because of its implications regarding Catalan nationalism) over the self-determination of peoples.

### **3.4.1. The Declaration of Minimal Demands and the eviction attempt**

The “Content Commission” was created to discuss and formulate a statement of “minimal demands”, to communicate to the wider public. The discussions nevertheless represented the first important conflict. Some participants, including anarchists and autonomous leftists were against the very idea of demanding something from the (neoliberal) state. Indeed, collective memories of the anarchist experience during the Spanish Civil War infused the discussions with libertarian ideals. Others felt that the enriching heterogeneity of the square precluded a quick prioritization of a finite list of demands, while still others feared that the radical connotations of claims would have been lost before the approval of the Content Commission and the GA was sought. Finally some perceived the process of the square as not just a means to something, but an end in itself (Castells, 2012; Melucci, 1989).

Soon it was clear that the Content Commission was unable to formulate a declaration early on, hence while it generated a whole new set of thematic sub-commissions<sup>34</sup>, where participants could be involved in more sectorial and profound deliberations linked to long term objectives, “minimal demands” were confined to a newborn specific sub-commission. The final declaration included the following themes<sup>35</sup>: no more privileges for politicians, bankers and those earning large incomes, decent salaries and quality of life for all, participatory democracy and freedom of information, the right to a house, to quality public services, and to sustainability (environmental concerns).

On 27 May 2011 an attempt to evict Plaza Catalunya with the excuse of cleaning the square produced a massive flow of support into the square. While non-violently resisting, some demonstrators were beaten by the police. This event, and the following reoccupation of the square, produced anger and then enthusiasm, and new adherents joined the movement to save the square. Frame alignment (“democracy is not real”) was strengthened for participants new to political activism, through the shocking experience of repression. This event also

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<sup>34</sup> Examples of thematic sub-commissions are: environmental, education, democracy, research, housing, culture, electoral law, economics, feminist, and immigration.

<sup>35</sup> The manifesto can be found at <http://acampadabcn.wordpress.com/demandes/>.



reinforced the internal solidarity and the collective identity of participants by provoking further civil disobedience and more “confrontational” actions<sup>36</sup>.

### 3.4.2. The GA, content commissions and the INCS

A second important internal conflict involved the removal of the encampments, which had a bearing also on subsequent developments. The majority view, reflected in the GA’s decisions, of a post-acampada evolution, involved a decentralisation of the movement to neighbourhoods, to ensure more active individual involvement in assemblies and local urban realities. A consensus regarding the exact timing for removing the encampments was not reached. While the majority of commissions/people left the square in the first week of June, a relatively small group of resistant people were “emotionally attached” to Plaza Catalunya square as a powerful symbolic “free space” and stayed until the third week. As a 40-year-old woman from the Health Commission put it (I22:279), the square was a “*small paradise in which strong comradeship, formation, information were being lived, and you were generating your own resources, it was like a panacea*”. The lack of a full consensus on whether and when to remove the acampada was one of the factors that delegitimised the GA, which eventually ceased to be convened. Hence the Inter-Neighbourhood Coordination Space (INCS) became the only general coordination entity. Nevertheless, in some adversarial meetings of the INCS in September, it was decided that the INCS would not have decision making power, which belonged instead to *barrios* assemblies, as a central decision-coordinating organ was perceived as hierarchy reproduction. Moreover, according to the “barrio perspective”, thematic commissions should have been dismantled, as they belonged to the previous phase, the acampada, and each thematic issue should have been dealt with at the neighbourhood level. In a difficult, “war of power” transition (I23:10), the INCS decided to remain completely separate and rejected any interference from the commissions, which, similarly to the GA had lost all representativeness in the eyes of *barrio* partisans. Many committees were dismantled with the majority of participants pouring into the barrios - but others survived, like electoral law, communication, popular consultation, education, health, culture, outraged feminists, outraged university, degrowth, and international committees.

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<sup>36</sup> This view is also shared by Jurado Gilabert (2014:37).

### 3.4.3. The post-acampada phase

The post-acampada period is characterised by rich activity at the neighbourhood level, with both assemblies and working groups in each neighbourhood gathering every 1-2 weeks, and coordinating themselves through the INCS, as well as continued activity of some commissions. The collective identity of the movement gradually shifted towards more radical positions<sup>37</sup>, hence somehow conflating the rich heterogeneity of (ideological) positions (but still preserving a good dose of heterogeneity).

On 14-15 June 2011 thousands of people camped around the Catalan Parliament, symbolically blocking the entrance to parliamentarians, to protest against proposed social cuts. The demonstrations were portrayed by some (conservative) media as a violent attack to democracy, with the sensational scene of members of the Catalan government entering the Parliament by helicopter. While this event reinvigorated the debate on the strategic importance of pacifism, the repression also confirmed the tendency towards more civil disobedience, already triggered by the 27 May eviction.

On 19 June decentralized demonstrations took place against the Pact for the Euro in Brussels, while since mid-June the 15M started to coordinate actions with the “Platform of Mortgage Victims” (PAH), an assembly-based platform born in 2009 to protect the rights of homeowners against foreclosures and lobby for a change towards non-recourse debt through direct action against mortgage execution, and legislative initiatives (later engaging also in occupation of empty apartments in the hands of banks). On 15 October 2011 an international demonstration with the slogan “United against the global crisis” witnessed the participation of 951 cities from 82 countries in the world, and in Barcelona the demonstration was followed by actions and occupations.

After the student mobilisations in November, 2012 witnessed two general strikes against labour reform and austerity policies<sup>38</sup>, the “Valencian spring” against cuts in education, the controversial initiative of “surrounding” the Parliament in Madrid (“Rodea el Congreso”) on 26-29 September, and celebrations of the anniversary of the movement from the 12-15 May in

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<sup>37</sup> For example, the manifesto of the first anniversary explicitly targeted capitalism, in contrast to the first ‘Real Democracy Now’ manifesto (that referred to an ‘ethic revolution’).

<sup>38</sup> On 14 November the biggest ever strike action at the European level was organised with Portugal, Greece and Italy (the latter two only adhered with a few hours stoppage).

many Spanish cities. In Barcelona the latter involved a demands manifesto, 4 intensive days of assemblies, speeches and the organisation of several actions.

The contents discussions for the manifesto originated from a draft presented by the RDN and other collectives and included the following points: no other bail-outs for banks; a citizens' audit of national debt; public education; right to housing, public housing and retroactive non-recourse debt; economic redistribution through fiscal policies and basic income; work and wealth redistribution; no precariousness of work and valuation of reproductive, domestic and care work. The event also triggered initiatives against banks, such as the lawsuit against the bailed out Bankia through crowd funding ("15MpaRato").

### **3.5. Framing analysis**

#### **3.5.1. Motivational framing: indignation**

The 15M was the result of an "indignation surge", incorporating in its mobilizations many so-called "normal" people, from all generations, that for the first time got enmeshed with political activism. Motivational framing is thus closely connected with the emotional dimension of the indignation frame and with the identification of an injustice frame. For mobilisation to occur, "inchoate anxieties" need to go through a process of transformation into moral indignation and outrage towards concrete policies and decision-makers (Goodwin et al, 2001). The RDN manifesto explicitly targeted the culprits: politicians, bankers and businessmen: "in Spain most of the political class does not even listen to us. *Politicians* should be bringing our voice to the institutions, facilitating the political participation of citizens through direct channels that provide the greatest benefit to the wider society, not to get rich and prosper at our expense, attending only to the *dictatorship of major economic powers* and holding them in power through a bipartidism headed by the immovable acronym PP & PSOE".

Beyond recruitment, collective identity expressed in solidarity is also indispensable in order to ensure durable commitment. The 15M, especially during the "acampada" phase, was extremely heterogeneous in its composition but managed to build a collective identity because of its strong inclusiveness, tolerance and solidarity, which allowed the participants to find a common ground beyond their ideological differences. Collective identity was boosted

through the construction of daily sharing practices of *caceroladas*, food sharing, night camping, assemblies, direct action etc. Tejerina and Perugorría (2012) characterize Acampada Sol as “made of people who want to be and live together”, and, similarly, in Plaza Catalunya, “communion”, “going back to human interconnections”, and “desire of being together” were also frequent allusions. In the *acampada* there were tourists offering to give translations, people bringing whatever needed materials, while, after the decentralizations to the barrios, some people had their “neighbourhood social life enriched”, and networks of mutual support were established in each neighbourhood assembly to help victims of foreclosures and/or people experiencing economic difficulties.

Solidarity also involved reciprocal support between struggles, both within 15M itself and between 15M activities and other collectives such as Revolta Global, PAH, etc. for diffusion and participation related activities.

Differently from Bauman’s analysis<sup>39</sup>, the characterising emotion of indignation nevertheless does not make the 15M a solely “emotional movement”. This is clear in the wider cognitive critique explained below.

### **3.5.2. Diagnostic framing: economism, the counter-revolution, and the crisis of values**

The 15M movement put the denunciation of the undemocratic character of current (liberal) parliamentary systems centre stage. Participants contend that voting every 4 years does not make a democracy. The frequency of unfulfilled electoral promises, and a corrupt two-party system that does not allow real political choice, creates an unrepresentative system, that is a “non-real democracy”.

They also point to a need to advance citizens’ rights to participation in decision-making, as a 35-year-old RDN activist put it: “*politics belongs to us day by day, and hence we want to decide on what it is, on what our lives are*” (I24:903). The slogan “no-one represents us” is both a denunciation of the un-representativeness of political institutions as well as the actualised affirmation of the prefigurative politics of direct democracy. The RDN slogan “we are not merchandise in the hands of politicians and bankers” rejects the subjugation of politics and justice to economics and the very interpretation of the crisis in terms of economic logics.

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<sup>39</sup> See [http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2011/10/17/actualidad/1318808156\\_278372.html](http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2011/10/17/actualidad/1318808156_278372.html)

As a 70-year-old man from Sant Andreu neighbourhood assembly explained:

*‘What normal people intend with crisis is simply the economic problem, no? (..) they don’t even touch upon the cultural crisis -(...) I said that it [i.e. the economic crisis] is an invention because there would be an economic crisis if it wasn’t possible to produce...and this is not true, on the contrary, we can produce more than it is needed’ (I21:429).*

The cultural substratum of the crisis and the actual degradation stem from the submission of all values to the economic one. The critique of economism was already in the RDN manifesto as “placing money above human beings”. Economism is criticised both from a cultural and political perspective: *“for me the problem is that money has become an end in itself. When capital accumulation becomes the only objective of the economy, this is a problem, the problem is that it does not respect anything else”* (focus group, 35 year woman, Culture and International Commissions, I30:772). Politics is subjugated by economic powers, and states have ceded their political sovereignty to the Troika and other major financial powers.

The debtocracy and the neoliberal-austerity policies are a “counterrevolution”, as an economic crisis has been fabricated to further dispossess the lower classes and undermine the (never-integrally achieved) welfare state. The “sleeping” people are yet to apprehend this robbery, but the slogan “this is not a crisis, it is a swindle” is revelatory.

Two other famous slogans were “System error: restart”, and “we are not anti-system, the system is anti-us”. The system of financialised capitalism undergoes a crisis whose root lies in the prioritization of certain types of values, such as the economic profit of investors, firms and individuals. Consequently, a “model change”, with “model” meaning the way development is conceived, has become imperative and “the new model” must subsume the insight that the “capitalist model of economic growth” is exhausted. There is widespread consciousness about the Western world’s high consumption levels and the ecological limits to growth. The crisis is also intrinsic to the productive model that leads to an unsustainable situation, as a 23-year-old male student from the Sants neighbourhood assembly succinctly reflected: *“we are realising that chasing only our profit does not bring benefits to the whole, on the contrary in the end it ends up being a catastrophe”* (I10:575).

The cultural crisis, or crisis of values, is hence also epitomised in consumerism – that *“has eaten the other values”* – and which, together with individualism, economism and competition, explains the cultural degradation of present society and the erosion of solidarity.

As one 22-year-old participant from the International Commission commented:

*‘On the one hand, we want to change all the values, no? (...) and raise consciousness that we cannot go on with an economy that destroys its own basis’ (I3:722).*

It is a crisis of direction, or a crisis of the meaning of life, as highlighted by a 50-year-old teacher involved in the Infrastructure and Education Commissions: *“we are in a mechanism, like hamsters on a wheel, once in a while you fall down and say: “we should really go down the wheel and do other things” and instead the majority of people is still there running” (I20:297).*

### **3.5.3. Prognostic framing**

#### **3.5.3.1. Real democracy**

Two famous slogans of the movement were “they call it democracy and it isn’t” and “no-one represents us”. The latter could be intended in two fashions, depending on the political-ideological positions. On the one hand, there is the libertarian quest that self-organization and a direct democracy system could be generalised and substitute parliamentary systems. This vision is typically associated with what I call below the “autonomy faction”. This position is characterized by a communitarian perspective centred on the neighbourhood and founded upon solidarity relationships, or with confederate systems and networks of direct democracy. Hence it follows a rejection of the professionalisation of politics. Nevertheless, virtually all interviewees sharing this perspective referred to an important prerequisite for a direct democracy generalisation: profound education processes are an indispensable precondition for steering the cultural change needed to wean people from a system of representative democracy. One of these education channels is assemblies and self-organization, with their learning and participation-fuelling potential.

On the other hand, the slogan “no-one represents us” is intended by others as a provocation and as a claim to strengthen participation within institutional politics, and improve representation mechanisms (through for example, but not limited to, a change of electoral law). While this “participatory democracy” perspective maintains that some dose of representation is necessary or cannot be avoided, it also foresees injections of direct democracy (for example at the local level or with referenda) in a sort of mixed system, or it is compounded by visions of electronic democracy or technopolitics (as in the “X Party”, the

new 15-M project for a political party). This perspective is typically associated with what below I call “pragmatist faction”.

Participants from both perspectives alluded to the citizen’s responsibility to participate by exerting control methods such as protests. Assemblies are valued for empowering and fostering participation, conveying deliberation and “collective intelligence. Although the assembly method is slow and tiring, *“what is important is the process, because if the process is not carried out well, what comes out, what is decided in an assembly is not important because people didn’t assume it”* (40-year-old woman from the Health Commission, I22:243). The ability to reach a consensus within an assembly depends on the willingness of participants to reach it (and not to block it), hence the importance of maintaining an open attitude of tolerance. Assemblies are also critically assessed (Calvo et al. 2011:13). Some of the critiques included the dominance exerted by those having oratory skills, populism, and the risk of political manipulation in consensus building.

“Real democracy” is not limited only to the political domain, but it is connected to wider demands for social and environmental justice. As epitomized in the Outraged Feminists manifesto<sup>40</sup>: *“In this transformation it is essential to incorporate a feminist perspective in the face of the crisis: ecological, energetic, economic, social, of food and social reproduction, and to undertake social processes of sustainability for a urban and land management model which guarantees food sovereignty, that prioritizes renewable energies instead of nuclear centrals, and promotes social and solidarity economy development models”*.

Further, for the autonomous faction, economic democracy is also an important ingredient for a “real democracy”, and it is linked to radical changes through democratic (self)management of work and production. A real democracy is “to imagine a democracy in all the realms of life” (I26:1131).

### **3.5.3.2. The imperial mode of living and degrowth**

A diffused awareness that the economic crisis is not temporary nor cyclical and that previous (unsustainable) levels of consumption and welfare cannot be resumed is widespread (see also Calle Collado, 2012; Alvarez, 2011; Arellano Yanguas et al., 2012:55; Jurado Gilabert, 2014:60). The environmental unsustainability of economic growth was also one of the points

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<sup>40</sup> See <http://feministesindignades.blogspot.it/p/manifest.html>

of the Manifesto of Minimal Demands, which stated: “the economic system cannot be based on indefinite growth. This is not sustainable”. The degrowth discourse, supported, among others, by “movement intellectuals” (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991) such as Arcadi Oliveres, is closely tied to redistributive and social justice issues: “*welfare is social justice for everyone the same, so well, this implies that we should all lower our acquisitive levels*” (40-year-old woman from Health Commission, I22:517). A degrowth commission was already established since the Acampada (along with the Environment Commission), and after the encampments it continued to organize activities such as “the day without purchases”, the indignant university, awareness raising public talks etc. For many participants, ecological limits to growth have already been reached, so the solution is a socio-economic model of society not based on growth of consumption and of appropriation of resources – what Brand and Wissen (2012) call the “imperial mode of living” - which would entail thorough cultural changes. The degrowth vision links directly with a critique of capitalism: “*Fairly distributed, everything is possible (...) but the capitalist system works in a way that it only functions when it has the maximum profit (...) In this way it is a perverted system because it is based on maximum growth*” (36-year-old woman from Poble Sec neighbourhood assembly, I12: 378). Claims for social rights in education, health and housing - through for ex. demonstrations for public education (like in the “Marea groga”), encampments in public hospitals against privatizations and actions against foreclosures and occupations of evicted apartments held by banks (a vast campaign called “Obra social de la PAH”) - went hand in hand with the claims for a different economic model not based on economic growth and ever increasing consumption. As explained by a 50 year old man participating to the Infrastructure Commission (I20:27): “*Until a few years ago there were more (social) rights and those need to be recuperated, but on the other hand there is awareness of the fact that there is an unsustainable economic model that cannot continue, because, I mean there is no solution in that direction. Other roads have to be found in the sense that it must be understood that unsustainable consumption has to be reduced, otherwise it means that we want it all and this is not possible. The good thing is that this can be seen in a positive way: to lose a part of consumerism does not mean to lose quality but to gain it, and to exit this aberrant and intolerable logics of production and consumption*”. An “environmental justice” component of the movement materialized in an activism directed at safeguarding and protecting neighborhoods and territories against urban speculation, from the platform “Salvem el Casc Antic” to mobilizations against the project



“opening 16 doors to Collserola Park”<sup>41</sup>, from the commission “Rethinking Poble Sec” and the platform “Aturem el Pla Parallel”<sup>42</sup> to the platform “Aturem Eurovegas” against the construction of the huge gambling complex of Eurovegas.

### 3.6. Collective identity and frame disputes

After the removal of the *acampada*, the collective identity of the movement evolved towards focusing on the construction of alternatives at the local level. This second stage stemmed in part from the awareness that a political change could not be brought about swiftly. Nevertheless, the friction between thematic commissions/RDN on one side, and the *barrios*, on the other, meant that two different factions proceeded concurrently. According to the diagnostic framing of virtually all the interviewees active at the neighbourhood level but also some participants of commissions such as Degrowth or Education (termed here as “autonomy faction”), social rights degradation demands the establishment of a “parallel system” of alternatives and self-management. Efforts flowed into the construction of micro-experiences in many different spheres with the vision of extending self-management to many life realms, with the belief that social change needs to start from the individual level. The prognostic vision is hence actualised, instantiated and implemented in a practical life experiment. As one 36-year-old participant with an intensive activism past in the alterglobalization movement asserted: “*The Social Forum was to speculate on how a better world could be, and 15-M is to demand that we wanted a better world, not ask for it but build it*” (I19:391). A variety of initiatives have been realised or strongly supported: the Catalunya Fair (and Network) of Solidarity Economy, free social canteens for the disadvantaged, periodic second hand barter markets organised by many neighbourhood assemblies<sup>43</sup>, (legal and not) self-management of empty urban plots, disused factories, social centres and of an expropriated bank in the neighbourhood of Gracia<sup>44</sup>, self-organised alternative “fiestas de barrios”, communal urban gardens<sup>45</sup>, and consumption cooperatives<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> See for ex. [http://assembleasarrasantgervasi.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/120124\\_manifestoriginal\\_9barris.pdf](http://assembleasarrasantgervasi.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/120124_manifestoriginal_9barris.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> <http://assemblea.barripoblesec.org/presentacio-de-la-plataforma-veinal-aturem-el-pla-paral%C2%B7lel/>

<sup>43</sup> Barter markets in Catalunya have increased in the last decade from 2 to 132 (CRIC, 2013). See the website [www.intercanvis.net](http://www.intercanvis.net)

<sup>44</sup> Some examples are the project “Recreant Cruilles” (<http://recreantcruilles.wordpress.com/>), Can Batlló (<http://canbatllo.wordpress.com/>), Flor de Maig (<http://ateneuflordemaig.wordpress.com/>), Gracia expropriated bank (<http://bancexpropiatgracia.wordpress.com/>), Calafou (<https://calafou.org/>), Ateneu La Base (<http://www.labase.info/>).

<sup>45</sup> Some information on urban gardens in Barcelona can be found here: <http://huertosurbanosbarcelona.wordpress.com/ubicacion-de-los-huertos-mapa/>

According to the alternative faction grossly associated with commissions, especially the Communication and International commissions, RDN, the X Party and the Platform for the Citizens Audit of Debt (PACD), radical changes could only result from a proactive and programmatic activism based on skilful organisation (also through Information & Communication Technology), and aimed at concrete objectives, such as joint campaigns coordinated with other groups in Spain and beyond, that facilitate “exit hibernation” (I30:666). Self-management has empowering potentialities, but is not effective for creating consensus or obtaining concrete results for the wider population, as it is merely a strategy for resistance in the face of impotence. These participants are advocates of technopolitics (Alcazan et al., 2012; Jurado Gilabert, 2014; Toret et al., 2013), which could be described as a new politics and activism interfacing internet and physical space (Toret et al., 2013), allowing the creation of widely participated events and actions (from the RDN initial call to the “Toque a Bankia” and “Rodea el Congreso”, to the 15mPaRato and “La Caixa es Mordor”), and (with the hope of) possibly creating some sort of electronic democracy (or “democracy 4.0”). Collective identity stems from a “common way of working”, “a new way of doing things”. These participants stress that “methodology” involves flexibility and not an essentialist position closed in fixed (endogamic) identitarian formats such as non-party politics, the square, or even neighbourhood assemblies. Methodology is “a normal and natural answer to the “fossilization of ideologies”, and implies a rethinking of politics through a revisited institutional confrontation and direct intervention into the socio-political sphere.

As illustrated in the historical excursus, the collective identity emerged throughout the “action in action” (Melucci, 1989) and the two factions materialised during conflictual transformative events. The two factions also differed as to the role of ideologies, a topic that is explored in the following section.

### **3.7. The role of ideologies**

As mentioned above, one of the characteristics sometimes ascribed to NSMs is their “post-ideological” nature (see for ex. Offe, 1990). Yet, this is not straightforward in the Indignados movement. It is true that RDN was able to gather such strong popular support for the first May 15<sup>th</sup> demonstration thanks to a new type of language, deprived of traditional ideological

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<sup>46</sup> Consumption cooperatives in Catalunya have increased from less than 10 to 120 in the last decade (CRIC, 2013).

bent (Gago and Fernández-Savater, 2011; Subirats, 2011:50-51), and the “political identity divesting” process helped to create a collective identity the first days of encampments. Nevertheless, starting from the square occupation, dynamics within the movement were in part gradually infused with the discourses of existing social movements: *“this [the square] is where activists that before the movement had been thinking about alternative forms of organisation (...) come together in the square and take advantage of this movement as a sounding board to get their ideas disseminated”* (31-year-old male participant to the square occupation, I17:271). The critique gradually moved from anger addressed to a “caste” of politicians and bankers and emotional (at times populist) slogans to a more articulated critique. As one 36-year-old participant in the square occupations commented: *“The 15M is against “these sons of bitch of bankers and presidents” (...) but the discourse has been improving and maturing, and people little by little and thanks to the square, have sophisticated the discourse from an anger towards something they didn’t know to a critique of financial, international and corporate capitalism”* (I19:499). Free spaces can hence represent an important locus for the interaction of people with very different backgrounds, leading to cross-fertilisation and politicisation (Taibo, 2012).

Furthermore, the role of ideologies differed in the two factions. According to the autonomous faction, direct democracy facilitated the development of an “experimenting dialogue” between different (traditional) ideologies, which nourished the movement itself. The “original cleavage” of the Civil War (Aguilar, 2012), and the collective memory of the 20th century Catalan anarchist cooperative movement constituted an important driver for a libertarian and autonomous ideological bent, at times intermingled with Catalan nationalism. In some neighbourhoods such as Poble Sec, collective memory even acted through what Melucci (1996) calls “rebirth” or “regressive utopia”, a vision of comprehensive transformation and regeneration of the present through mythic reaffirmation and return to a past situation.

In contrast, in the pragmatist faction, (traditional leftist) ideologies were negated, denounced as old, divisive, constraining and anachronistic dogma, or were strategically hidden in order to gain wider support. As an X Party and ex-RDN member observed: *“Instead of saying to people “join our [political] tag”, we say “let’s work together and let’s do things”, that is, “let’s throw out the tag in the flushed water, because the tag is what divides us”* (35-year-old man, X Party, focus group I32:500). Methodology was perceived as the common ground able to overtake the crisis of representation involving also ideologies, as “methodology is “let’s

*create the way to create new ideas” and change things, not “I put on top of everything The Capital”* (36-year-old woman, International Commission, focus group I30:668). While this faction shared an ideological bond around a critique of neoliberalism, it rejected the dichotomy of reformist versus revolutionary strategy. Some claims for reforms can indeed be revolutionary or radical when they imply an incompatibility with the system logics (like the claim of debt cancellation from PACD), or when they are radically “asked” or performed (an exemplar case being the demand of non-recourse debt, claimed by PAH both through collection of signatures for a popular referendum and “performed” through evictions blockages and occupations).

In both factions, but most notably in the autonomous splinter group, a gradual “radicalisation process” was partly driven by the retreat, after the removal of the encampments, of many of the so-called “common people” and by a politicisation of the lay people that stayed in the movement. The movement also fundamentally questioned the transition after Franquism, perceived as not veritably democratic (this is also found by Miró and Ruggieri (2011) and Calle Collado (2011)).

In sum, although the Indignados movement partially downplayed the ideological element in order to build its collective identity (Benski et al., 2013), traditional ideologies still constituted an important cultural tool for the movement<sup>47</sup>, both when partially drawing from them and when consciously opposing them for building diagnostic frames. Collective memory can play an important role in shaping a movement’s ideologies and frames. I agree with Steinberg (1998) that, especially in heterogeneous and broad based movements such as the Indignados, frames constitute the outer boundaries which can accommodate different ideologies. Frames are indeed a more general, overarching, porous and immediate interpretation of reality. But ideologies can also be put into question, especially in “unsettled times” (Swidler, 1986), and jettisoned through the construction of antagonising frames. Another feature of NSMs is based the distinction between materialistic and post-materialistic values, to which I turn in the next section.

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<sup>47</sup> A similar view is shared by Jurado Gilabert (2014:37)

### **3.8. Post-materialism and the environment**

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, one of the key defining traits of new social movements is the abandonment of a collective action based on economic grievances that characterized the working class movement (Johnston et al, 1994; Buechler, 1995). The Pacification of the class cleavage afforded by Fordism liberated space for the emergence of new types of values (Della Porta, 2013b; Habermas, 1981)—based not on socio-economic grievances but on post-materialist values - which engendered a new type of collective action. Inglehart’s “silent revolution”, drawing upon Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and suggesting that humans develop higher, post-materialistic needs (like self-expression and environmental concerns) only after having satisfied survival needs, had great influence upon the most important NSM theorists (see for ex Habermas, 1981:33; Melucci:177-178, 1989; Dalton, 1990).

NSMs hence focus on the symbolic and cultural struggles (Melucci, 1989; Touraine, 1978; Offe, 1985) rather than for material resources, “the “anti-productivist “post-industrial” cultural model of the new movements is their defining and damning characteristics” (Cohen, 1983:97).

If on the one hand, the value change thesis maintains that economic development is conducive to the spread of postmaterialist values, on the other it predicts that economic decline would have the opposite effects (Inglehart 1981), hence causing materialist values to displace post-materialist ones. A reversal towards materialist values has indeed been found by some quantitative studies for the latest cycle of protest (Cameron, 2013; Grasso and Giugni, 2013). Several authors maintain that, contrarily to NSMs’ “pacified” class cleavage, the “Occupy social movements” put center stage class and materialist grievances (Della Porta, 2013b; Grasso and Giugni, 2013; Tejerina et al, 2013, Hammond, 2013). Certainly, the indignant mobilization find their antecedent in the increasing levels of social inequalities, precarious employment and proletarianisation of the middle classes rooted in neoliberalism (Della Porta, 2013b; Tejerina et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the cognitive critique explained above shows that the indignados movement was far from being reduced to redistributive claims directed against austerity policies and the cutting back of the welfare state: although the latter were obviously present, “real democracy”, cultural and environmental claims were at the heart of the critique.

Langman (2013) asserts that the Indignados/Occupy are both responses to economic retrenchments (displaying materialistic values) as well as to concerns about identity, self-realization and post-materialistic values. Similar concerns were highlighted also for the alterglobalization movement where conflicts for social rights coexisted with “post-materialistic themes” (Della Porta et al, 2006:241,244; Crossley, 2003; Morena, 2013). While Della Porta and Reiter (2012:5-6), and Eggert and Giugni (2012) found that there is some “homogenization trend” between workers’ type movements and “new” movements with respect to values, hence weakening the explanatory function of the post-materialist thesis, Langman (2013) and Morena (2013) advocate its renewed usefulness. Given that materialist and post-materialist values were conceived to be antagonistic and inversely related (Barker and Dale, 1998), it is not clear though how they could actually co-exist, a subject which deserves further scrutiny.

The coexistence of materialistic and post-materialistic values in the Indignados movement did not occur through the presence of “different constellations of organizations, some of them traditional and some of them newer” (Della Porta and Reiter, 2012:6; Della Porta et al., 2006:244), i.e. some of them asking for economic growth and redistribution and others claiming “real democracy” and focusing on degrowth. Indeed, both claims were deeply intertwined within the same individual interviews, within the same collectives, in the declarations of Minimal Demands as well as in the RDN Manifesto. The cognitive critique explained above challenges that very distinction and conceptualization. The idea of higher level, post-materialistic claims (which for Inglehart would include issues from self-expression and participatory democracy to environmental concerns), have conceptually been criticised for the assumption of a universal, cross-cultural hierarchy of needs (West, 2013). From the environmental point of view, this theory was confuted on empirical grounds by studies such as Dunlap and York (2008) and Givens and Jorgenson (2011) as it failed to consider the “environmentalism of the poor” (Guha and Martinez-Alier, 1997; Brechin and Willett, 1994; Martinez-Alier, 1997). The “objective problems-subjective values” (OPSV) hypothesis (Brechin, 1999; Inglehart, 1995) attempted to correct that bias, accounting for environmental concerns in less developed countries when environmental degradation directly touches upon people. Nevertheless, it created two types of environmentalisms, in the South derived from citizens experiencing directly pollution and environmental problems, and in the North from post-materialistic values (Dunlap and York, 2008; Givens and Jorgenson, 2011).

More generally, the hierarchy of needs epistemology failed to acknowledge the “material roots of prosperity” (Martinez-Alier, 1995) and the treadmill of production theories (Givens

and Jorgenson, 2011) which make it possible to maintain environmental concerns even in a developed country experiencing the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression. Further, the cognitive critique explained above forces us to go even beyond treadmill of production theories (hence “treadmill of accumulation” might be a better expression, see Bellamy Foster et al., 2010). Materialistic claims (which for Inglehart are linked to economic security, economic growth and redistribution) are indeed intended not in economic terms but in social justice terms, which encompass redistributive claims but exclude (and even conflict with) claims of economic growth. For the Indignados degrowth is deeply connected with the cultural critique of economism and consumerism, and stems from a double concern about both the *material* environmental consequences of affluence and social justice. This double concern, not considered by Inglehart, has indeed been especially visible in a country that entered the economic crisis by way of an enormous housing bubble, with the paradoxical situation of 3.4 million homes lying empty in 2011, while more than 350,000 families were being evicted between 2008 and 2012 (Naredo and Montiel Márquez, 2011).

With this new re-conceptualisation, the dichotomous distinction becomes misleading: the movement fundamentally questions the opposition between materialistic and post-materialistic claims. As succinctly stated by Colin and Dale (1998:76), “it is bad sociology that sharply separates the material and symbolic”, as “material needs are loaded with cultural and symbolic significance and symbolic needs require access to material resources to be fulfilled”. Further, scarcity for the majority is systematically reproduced by capitalist exploitation (Colin and Dale, 1998:75), even during periods of affluence.

In the Indignados, both values are indeed entangled and imbued with ideals of social justice and are, in a sense, “materialistic”, but in a different way than intended by Inglehart. Environmental concerns did not spring out of affluence, but in the midst of their “empoverished” economic conditions and they were linked to the aggravation of the process of disembedding (Fraser, 2012). The reconceptualized “materialism” here emphasizes both questions of economic goods and distribution and material livelihoods, concerns with the everyday life (Meyer, 2008) taking into consideration “geographies of responsibility” (Massey, 2004) or the “principle of responsibility” (Federici, 2011), i.e. paying attention to “what is produced, how, where, and in which life condition”. Some authors (Dryzek, 2013:211; Schlosberg, 2013) have used the concept of “sustainable materialism”, where justice entails creating human practices and material flows that do not undermine environmental processes and systems. This concept is similar to eco-feminist concepts of embodied materialism (Salleh) and eco-feminist materialism (Mellor) (but deprived of the

genders implications of the latter). An embodied materialism joins the human condition to its natural condition, making politics deeply and consistently material (Salleh, 2004, 2009). In materialist eco-feminism, relations of power are reflected in the ability to free oneself from embodiedness and embeddedness “as if it had no limits, because those limits are born by others, including the earth itself” (Mellor, 1997). In this view, the indignados question those power relationships, and what they imply in terms of sustainability. For Salleh (2012) Occupy movements are largely constituted by the “meta-industrial class”, that is workers, women, precarious workers etc. inhabiting the domestic and geographic peripheries of capital, whose labor is grounded in the reproduction of embodied and ecological processes and exemplifies commoning and sustainability.

### **3.9. Conclusions**

This paper represents the first systematic frame analysis study on the Indignados movement, drawing from empirical research conducted in Barcelona. Frames have been analysed dynamically in the process of construction and evolution. The (conflictual) transformative events of the acampada phase had a bearing also on later “framing disputes” and tensions within the movement. Similarly to Benford (1993) frame disputes are connected with prognostic visions. Some insights regarding the relationships between frames and ideology have been provided. This case study also elucidates how strategic connotations are not one of the defining traits of framing processes: dichotomising cultural and strategic orientation to action (Polletta, 1997) is even less appropriate in a horizontal, assembly-based movement.

The indignados movement put to the fore the subjugation of politics and justice to economics, the diktats of markets and (financial) corporations over political decisions, sharpened through the neoliberal and austerity responses to the economic crisis. Nevertheless, the movement was not just a reaction to austerity policies and the economic crisis, but framed the crisis also as political, cultural and environmental crisis. The multi-dimensionality of the crisis conceptualization is intimately connected to the metapolitical critique put forward by the movement, i.e. a wide and integrated critique of the social imaginary of contemporaneous society and of (neo)liberal representative democracy (Offe, 1985; Brandt, 1986; Melucci, 1989). This critique hence does not involve single-issue claims, as argued sometimes in NSM



theory<sup>48</sup> (see for ex Offe, 1990; Olofsson, 1988), but a comprehensive vision, connecting social justice with environmental issues, and “real democracy” with a critique of economism. Limitations of NSM theory have been hence identified, particularly with respect to one of its core assumptions that links “new movements” to so-called post-materialistic values. Not only, as argued by some authors (Della Porta, 2013b; Tejerina et al, 2013), the importance of redistributive issues in the latest cycle of protest foregrounds the need to “bring political economy back in” social movement studies. This article is also emblematic of how social movements can nurture epistemological innovation: through the lens of the indignados’ cognitive critique, the postmaterialistic/materialistic differentiation has been criticized for the very dichotomisation of values, which does not reflect their meta-political critique. Therefore not only can sociology, through tools such as frame analysis, contribute to a better understanding of the ways societies react and organize politically against the global economic crisis, but an ethnographic study of the movements can also help us develop a sociological imagination and theory beyond the schemes of the past.

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<sup>48</sup> Our view is also shared by Kriesi (1988) and Katsiaficas (2006:13).

## **Chapter 4: Prefigurative territories: The creation of alternatives by the Indignados movement**

*“Do we see coming to life around us another way of life that heralds, that prefigures something new, something that would give some substantive content to the idea of self-management, self-government, autonomy, self-institution? In other words, can the idea of self-government take on its full force, attain its full appeal, if it is not also borne by other desires, by other 'needs' that cannot be satisfied within the contemporary social system? (...) What is being asked is this: is something of this sort, a rejection of the needs being nourished at present by the system and the appearance of other aims, beginning to dawn, to appear to be important to people living today?”*

Castoriadis, “From ecology to autonomy” (1997:250)

### **4.1. Introduction**

The mobilizations that started in 2011 brought the concept of space to the centerstage of social movements and their study (Pickerill & Krinsky, 2012). As Mason (2011) put it, “it was kicking off everywhere”. From Tahrir Square to Plaza del Sol, from Occupy Wall Street to Ghezi Park and Syntagma Square, the occupation of space represented a new, common repertoire that made these movements part of a distinct global ‘cycle of contention’ (Glasius and Pleyers, 2012; Tejerina et al., 2013; Hardt and Negri, 2012). The logics of aggregation and settlement into concrete physical spaces, through the viral flow of information enabled by social media, suddenly displaced the logics of networking typical of the alterglobalization movement (Juris, 2012). The camp was not just a repertoire of contention (Tejerina et al., 2013) but a vehicle for transformative political action and change, for both claiming and practicing “real democracy”, for asserting the right to public debate, direct democracy and self-organization in public space (Ramadan, 2013; Martínez and García, 2012). “Square politics” entailed reclaiming public space and transforming it into public spheres (Calhoun, 2013; Benski et al., 2013) through the use of horizontal, decentralized, assembly-based consensus democracy, for the construction of a counter-hegemonic narrative (Asara, forthcoming; Maeckelberg, 2011; Castells, 2012: 135; Benski et al, 2013; Kaika & Karaliotas, 2014).

According to Badiou (2012), the central location of camps is what makes the Indignados movement and the Arab Spring constitute a ‘historical revolt’ and not just an ‘immediate revolt. The locations of the occupying encampments were highly symbolic. Tahrir Square “occupied the heart of Cairo’s machine of power” (Ramadan, 2013), the settlements in Plaza

del Sol and Plaza Catalunya occupied crucial political and commercial hubs and centres of city life (Martinez and Garcia, 2012), Zuccotti Park was adjacent to Occupy Wall Street, and Syntagma square faces the Parliament (Kaika and Karaoliotas, 2014). This symbolism of occupying the city, the economic or political sphere was closely linked to the confrontational function of the camps (Marcuse, 2011) in relation to the “target space” (Sparke, 2013) of each. What has been referred to as “affect space” (Sparke, 2013) and “emotional geographies” (Arenas, 2014; Bosco, 2006) involved anger, grief, indignation, but also joy, solidarity and communal enjoyment.

This paper is concerned with the articulation and integration of the symbolic and the material functions of the indignant squares, or in other words, how the symbolic prefiguration of an alternative world produced new spaces and new social natures (Heynen et al., 2006). Towards this end, I introduce the concept of ‘prefigurative territories’ and analyse the indignant squares and spaces as such. The concepts of prefiguration and prefigurative politics have been widely used to refer to the type of politics adopted in camps of the so-called “occupy movements” (Tejerina et al. 2013). Their spatial dimension however has largely been taken for granted and undertheorized. This paper argues that prefigurative politics is deeply intermingled with and embodied in the politics and the production of new space. Prefigurative territories are those territories that are appropriated and *produced* through prefigurative politics. The indignant camps recreated the means of daily reproduction through the modification of space: from the communal kitchen to the medical care tent, from the library and other cultural activities, to the toilets and encampments (see for ex Ramadan, 2013; Maeckelbergh, 2012; Marom, 2013; Martínez & García, 2012; Milkman et al., 2013; van de Sande, 2013). This re-organization of space was not simply instrumental for the purposes of mobilization or publicity however. Following Lefebvre, they were interventions in the very process of production of social space, re-appropriated spaces contrasting with the dominant socio-economic order, alternative forms of public space (Dhaliwal, 2012; Halvorsen, 2014). The new communal spaces and projects created in the square contributed towards a continuous institutionalization, in the here and now, of new radical imaginaries (Kaika and Karaoliotas, 2014; Swyngedouw, 2012, 2014).

What though, were these imaginaries? Surprisingly little attention has been paid in the literature to this question beyond the obvious observation that the occupations prefigured a model of direct democracy. Scholars have noted that the Encampments were “enclaves of another order”, “spaces of freedom, resistance and liberation” (Ramadan, 2013), utopian

spaces (Sparke, 2013) modeling alternative communities, or carving out “spaces of experiment” (Graeber, 2011) for a radical democracy (Taylor, 2013). But what was being modelled or what were the experiments experimenting with? Swyngedouw (2014) for example argues that the occupations first and foremost represent the staging of equality and of the truly ‘political’. Transgressing the old symbolic order, they marked the construction of new egalitarian spaces and new spatial relations, both materially and symbolically. Yet, what sort of equality (or democracy) were the occupiers pointing to? Equality in what and how? Who will do what in the equal world that is being imagined, and how? This paper aims to further study the precise forms of egalitarian ‘sharing’ and ‘commoning’ prefigured by the movement (Stavrvides, 2012). How and why did the occupiers use and transform space? In other words, what was being prefigured by their spatialised practices?

The fact that such questions have received less attention is related to the tendency of many theorists to focus their analysis only on the activity in the squares, rather than follow “what happens when the squares are cleared, the tents removed and the energies dissipate, when the dream is over and the dawn of ordinary everyday life breaks again” (Swyngedouw, 2014:133). Such limited focus leads easily to the conclusion that a purely symbolic movement failed and finished there, rendering the question of what precisely it was pre-figuring less relevant or urgent. Hammond (2013) for example, notes that the Occupy movement in the U.S lost momentum after the encampments, a fact that leads Marcuse (2011) to charge it with a “fetishization of space”, a concern with the occupied spaces and the activities in them becoming the goal and sidelining the “bigger picture” of social change (Marcuse, 2011). Likewise, Kaika and Karaliotas (2014) study the practices of Athens’ Syntagma Square, and while they recognize that those practices did contribute to the flourishing of an alternative, solidarity economy in the aftermath of its occupation, they do not follow this process. Instead they declare the movement as failed, for not accomplishing its political agenda of stopping austerity. Harvey’s critique of the ‘militant particularism’ and the “parochialist politics” of social movement comes to mind here, as the suggestion of these scholars is that the occupied spaces which should have been only the “terrain of the struggle”, turned into the stake itself (Marcuse, 2011).

What happened in Athens or in the Occupy movement is not the subject of this paper (though for an alternative account of Athens closer to this work see Varvaroussis and Kallis, forthcoming). What this paper argues at length, however, is that the above accounts do not speak to the fate of the movement in Spain, and more particularly Barcelona, which is the

case dealt with here. From the very selection of the sites of the encampments in Spain, at the centres of city life, rather than at the centres of political (Syntagma) or economic (Wall Street) life, the indignados indicated their concern not only with demanding, but with *enacting* change. I argue indeed that in the Indignados movement prefigurative politics were deeply intermingled with a re-appropriation and production of new space, and, as in Badiou's repetition of the event, a "spreading of spores" (Marom, 2013) or a "mitosis of spaces and relations", a spatial prefigurative politics of multiplicity established appropriation of places and territories as a key repertoire of action. As this paper shows, the Indignados movement did not cease to exist after the squares were cleared. It shifted to neighborhood organizing and to making connections with everyday life. The objective of this paper is to understand precisely why and how this happened, and in turn, to empirically study the prefigurative production of space (what is called 'prefigurative territories') of the 15M movement. In doing so, this paper seeks to better understand the relationship between social mobilization and the production of new spaces, a crucial question in the search for transformational pathways to an ecological and egalitarian future.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 elaborates on the conceptual framework of prefigurative territories by revisiting the extant literature on social movements and the production of space on the one hand, and prefigurative politics on the other. Section 3 presents the case-study, the prefigurative territories of the 15M movement in Barcelona. In addition to the occupied square itself, four more emblematic projects in the city that reappropriated space are analysed, projects that were in one way or another closely linked to the 15M mobilization and the neighbourhood assemblies that followed it. These cases were chosen because they are the most powerful place-based projects linked to the 15M movement, and because of their diversity in terms of neighborhood location, type of property, and group composition.<sup>49</sup> For each project I detail its origins, explaining how and why it was linked to the occupied square, followed by a presentation of its prefigurative practices and the ways in which it produced new space. The analysis draws on 74 in-depth interviews and 6 mini-focus groups conducted in the period between May 2011 and May 2014, with 93 activists involved in the square occupations and the projects. I interviewed activists engaged in the everyday activities of the projects, both regular as well as 'leading' participants, conscious of

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<sup>49</sup> A prominent case in the 15M in Barcelona, Flor de Maig, has not been included because after having carried out two interviews I realized that it had less of the 'building of alternatives' dimension than the other cases, and much fewer participants were actively involved in it, while it displays some characteristics very similar to La Base (its closer resemblance to a social centre) and others features similar to Can Batlló (the longstanding, historical struggle).

maintaining gender balance (38 of interviewees were women) and age balance (between 20 and 73 years old). I asked my interviewees about the origins of the projects, how and why they became involved in them, and interrogating why they do what they do, emphasising the concrete material-ecological practices of each project. In addition to interviews, I spent some 600 hours as participant observer in the square and in the rest of the 4 cases, attending numerous neighborhood assemblies, spaces of coordination and events organized by the movements, keeping ethnographic notes, and recording the everyday practices of appropriating and transforming the territory, as well as the interpersonal and political conflicts that emerged. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed through a thematic analysis methodology (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Ryan and Bernard, 2003; Bryman, 2012:564-589). In approaching the material from a theoretical vantage point, that of prefigurative politics and the production of space, the research was driven to shape new theoretical constructs that best fit and describe the experience (e.g. prefigurative territories).

Section 4 then discusses the cross-cutting findings of the sub-cases. A key finding concerns the evolution of the prefigurative politics of 15M movement, from the consistence between means and ends and a foretaste of the alternative to come, to the actual building of alternatives. Contrary to what some argue, I maintain that prefigurative politics is not self-referential, and that it can be connected to the appropriation of space. The case of Barcelona demonstrates how abstract discussions about a future world in the Square were eventually embodied in the creation of new spaces that symbolised and enacted this world. If the Square merely *symbolised* another order, the ‘spin-off’ projects such as Can Batlló or La Base consciously started to build this other order. The material suggests that this search for social change is a conscious "movement" by the participants, in the sense that they have a vision of their actions as contributing to social change, and not just being alternative life-style choices, or mere survivalism. I discuss how activists perceive and envision their interaction and influence over the state, and also note a fundamental commitment of the projects towards opening up, engendering wider effects over the neighborhood, as well as creating and having to constantly negotiate the internal conflicts that an opening-up implies. The politicization of the projects in other words, cannot be taken for granted; it is always struggled for. Finally it is suggested that what the 15M movement pre-figures is captured in three concepts, that the participants themselves used repeatedly to give sense to their actions: commons, autonomy and ecologism/sufficiency.

## 4.2. Prefigurative territories

### 4.2.1 Prefigurative politics

Prefigurative politics, or prefiguration, can be defined as an approach to activism and social change that inscribes the goals of the movement into its practices and activities, hence aiming at creating the (vision of) alternative society, both in the present, but also through a future-oriented perspective through the creation of alternatives. The concept lies at the interception between several debates and discourses: anarchist and autonomist activism and reflections on social change (Clough & Blumberg, 2012; Ince, 2012; Mudu, 2004; Graeber, 2009; Katsiaficas, 2006; Gordon, 2008; Garland, 2010; Goyens, 2009; Membretti, 2007; Ruggiero, 2000); the “new politics” of the New Left (Maeckelbergh, 2011a, 2011b; Robnett, 1996; Lowe, 2007; Cornell, 2009), Gandhian non violence and the direct action tradition (Anderson, 2004a, 2004b; Franks, 2003; Carter, 1988), the women’s movement (Robnett, 1996; Anahita, 2009), the alterglobalization movement (Chatterton et al., 2013; Graeber, 2002) and, lately, practices born during the occupation of the squares in the latest cycle of protest (Maeckelbergh, 2012; Juris, 2012; Smucker, 2013; Sitrin, 2012b; Giri, 2013; van de Sande, 2013; Gitlin, 2013b; Pickerill & Krinsky, 2012; Sancho, 2014; Manilov, 2013; Maharawal, 2013; Graeber & Wolfe, 2012).

The first postulates of the concept can be thought of as having been laid down with anarchists Landauer and Kropotkin, and were linked to the way to bring about revolution. Kropotkin (1912) maintained that rather than waiting for the revolution, it was desirable to build the relationships desired immediately, through implementation of the principle of mutual aid. Landauer (2010) with the concept of structural renewal, argued that alternatives would have to be created alongside existing modes of social organization, through a complementary pairing of disengagement and reconstruction (Day, 2005): “we refuse to wait for the revolution in order to begin the realization of socialism; we begin the realization of socialism to bring about the revolution” (Landauer, 2010: 188). The new world hence should have been built “in the shell of the old” (Day, 2005; Lakey, 1973; Clough & Blumberg, 2012; Ince, 2012).

Prefiguration has been put forward as an alternative to Leninism, where a vanguard is considered necessary to bring about the revolution, through “an authoritarian and power-oriented model” (Boggs, 1977:100). For Boggs the prefigurative tradition began with 19<sup>th</sup>

century anarchism and continued with syndicalists and council communists (for Maeckelbergh, 2011b it also emerged during the 1848 revolts, the 1871 Paris Commune and the Spanish Civil War), directed against statism and hierarchical authority relations, perceived as embodied in political parties and trade unions. This rejection is related to the so-called consistence or equivalence between means and ends, which can be thought to constitute one of the three components of prefigurative politics (Yates, 2015). An egalitarian and free society cannot issue from authoritarian organization (Franks, 2003): as already pointed out by Landauer, “means and ends are not to be distinguished. Socialism is not an end that requires means. Socialism is action that carries its ends within itself” (Landauer, 2010:201). Hence many retrieved a tension between prefiguration and consequentialism. Wini Breines (1982) called this focus on means typical of the New Left’s “anti-organizational” stance, which, although different from what she calls the “strategic politics” typical of the “old politics” (i.e. the workers’ movement), was not intended as disorganized but as “a wariness of hierarchy and centralized organization”.

Prefigurative politics in the New Left hence involved an awareness that the process as well as personal transformation could not be separated from structural political change. It entailed the crux of living and practicing relationships and political forms embodying and prefiguring the desired society, and the view of revolution as an ongoing process of social and personal transformation (Epstein, 1991; Breines, 1982). In the 1960s, the ideals of participatory democracy implied the incorporation of everyone into decision-making processes, through for example consensus-based processes. Developing the insights of Breines (1982) and analyzing the evolution of prefigurative politics from the New Left to the alterglobalization movement, Maeckelbergh (2011a) argues that prefigurative politics cannot be labeled as simply “expressive”, instead they are also strategic as they allow the creation of the democratic structures necessary to decide the goals of a movement collectively, in contrast to “a linear march towards the seizure of state power (after which the predetermined collectively shared goal could be instilled)”. De Angelis (2014) similarly talks about “the fallacy of the model”, that is, the (misguided) idea that to replace the current system, another model should be ready to take its place, allowing new systems and relations to emerge during the process. The process and the goals are intricately entwined, as the goals emerge from the process, while the creation of those democratic structures for determining the goals is a goal in itself (Maeckelbergh, 2011a). The instrumental dimension of prefigurative politics hence stems from its focus on process and experimentation, and on the foretaste of a future democratic



society, which allows for the determination and pursuit of multiple and open goals through horizontality, a concept that emerged with the social justice movement, ensuring diversity within movements (ibid). In contrast to the “ideological uniformity” of the “centralist party”, the global justice movement is “not opposed to organization. It is about creating new forms of organization”: horizontal networks based on principles of decentralized, non-hierarchical consensus democracy (Graeber, 2002). As Graeber (2002:72) put it: “It’s one thing to say, ‘Another world is possible’. It’s another to experience it, however momentarily”, this experience can occur through ‘networks embodying or prefiguring utopian alternatives’ (Juris, 2008:131).

This “foretaste” of a future democratic society constitutes the second dimension of prefigurative politics, the “synecdochic” or “proleptic” dimension. Prefiguration is “synecdochic”, as “it contains elements of the object it is representing” (Franks, 2003; Carter, 1988). It is a form of action that is itself a model for the change one wishes to bring about (Graeber, 2009:210), or proleptic, as it enacts or anticipates some feature of an “alternative world” as though it has already been achieved, attempting “to build the future in the present” (Yates, 2015; Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006).

As a third dimension of prefigurative politics, prefiguration can be considered as “a constructive direct action” (Gordon, 2008). Indeed, the third dimension of prefigurative politics can be viewed as the construction of alternatives, in the understanding of politics as an instrument of social change (Yates, 2015). This dimension builds on the proleptic component, on the “foretaste” to which Maeckelbergh (2011a) refers to, which foregrounds experimentation in mobilization-related or everyday activities and demonstration and proliferation of similar practices (Yates, 2015). The (horizontal) “process” is exploratory (Holloway, 2010) insofar as the process prefigures and creates alternative political structures (Day, 2005:37), and goals are determined collectively through experimentation: as the Zapatista said, “preguntando caminamos” (‘questioning, we walk’), the “struggle for a different world must create that society through its forms of struggle (ibid:45).

This construction of an alternative dimension also builds on the role of proliferation and diffusion of similar practices, usually assuming an interstitial perspective of social change, or an “in the shell of the old” approach. Interstitial transformation is used in social theory to describe various kinds of processes that occur in the “interstices” or cracks of dominant social structures of power (Wright, 2010). This perspective sometimes emphasises the potential for

the transformation of values through a prefigurative politics that can grow through accretion, as in Lakey's (1973) "Strategy for a living revolution" and the "building of community" of Breines' and Epstein's work. At other times it focuses more on economic practices and institutions, as in Gibson-Graham's and Olin Wright's work. One significant point of the latter, more explicitly anti- or post-capitalism perspective on interstitial transformation is that "we stop making capitalism", that instead of "focusing our attention on the destruction of capitalism, we concentrate on building something else" (Holloway, 2010:50; Dinerstein, 2012). By building new forms of social empowerment and alternative institutions and "real utopias", economic life becomes less dependent upon capitalist firms and markets (Wright, 2010). Although they differ from "ruptural transformations" aimed at a sharp break from existing institutions and seizing of state power, cracks and interstitial transformations are not spaces of exodus or escape that avoid conflict, and transformations are not smooth, non conflictual processes (Holloway, 2010; Wright, 2010). In fact, while many of these spaces do not seem to pose any immediate threat to dominant classes, they can nevertheless gradually push against the state and public policy to expand these spaces (Wright, 2013). Interstitial projects challenge exploitation, domination and inequality, they do not abjure struggle but see it as "the incremental modifications of the underlying structures of a social system and its mechanisms of social reproduction that cumulatively transform the system" (Wright, 2010: 228). In this sense, Olin Wright talks about interstitial transformations being a "metamorphosis", while De Angelis (2014) refers to Marx's conception of "social revolution" – as opposed to the Leninist political revolution – where new social relations pose the basis for a new socio-economic polity and acts as a "perturbation" of the established dominant systems, leading to the dissolution of the "old society".

In sum, a "multiplicity of interstitial movements running from the particular" (Holloway, 2010:11) and the building of "real utopias" can both prefigure and move us towards those alternatives (Wright, 2010). These spaces can "keep society open to alternative practices and futures and cultivate the capacity to develop these" (Levitas, 2013), while serving a critical ideological function by showing that those alternative ways of working and living are possible, and potentially eroding the constraints themselves (Wright, 2010).

Prefigurative politics literature nevertheless misses an understanding of the spatial dimension that was so important during the square occupations of the indignados movement. The concept of free space is used as the 'spatial complement' of prefigurative politics in social movement studies, and is thus analysed in the next section.

#### 4.2.2 Free spaces in social movement studies

As observed by Polletta (1999), terms such as free spaces, “protected spaces”, “safe spaces”, “spatial preserves”, “havens”, “sequestered social sites”, “cultural laboratories”, “spheres of cultural autonomy”, or “scenes” have been used by sociologists, political scientists and historians to denote very similar concepts. She uses the concept of “free space”, coined by Evans and Boyte (1986)<sup>50</sup> to refer to this collection of meanings, summarized as “small-scale settings within a community or movement that are removed from the direct control of dominant groups, are voluntarily participated in, and generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies political mobilization” (Polletta, 1999:1). Polletta (1999) notes that the usefulness of the free space concept stems from its capacity to highlight how counterhegemonic frames do not originate from a disembodied oppositional consciousness, but from long-standing community institutions. Three structures of free space are identified on the basis of types of associational ties and roles in identifying opportunities, recruiting participants and crafting action frames, one of them being prefigurative structures.<sup>51</sup> Prefigurative structures are for Polletta explicitly political and oppositional, created in movements already underway, helping to sustain members’ commitment to the cause by prefiguring the society the movement is seeking to build through relationships characterized by symmetry. Prefigurative structures in this light can be thought of as Bey’s (1991) temporary autonomous zones, alternative food coops and social centres (Hodkinson, 2012; Mudu, 2004; Pruijt, 2013). Nevertheless, for Polletta (1999:12) prefigurative groups are difficult to sustain, not only because the requirements of social inequalities can infect deliberations, but also because egalitarian decisionmaking is difficult to maintain in compatibility with the demands of quick responses to environmental demands. Hence prefigurative structures are doomed to perish or be converted in indigenous institutions, which are normally conservative structures isolated from dominant institutions and difficult to

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<sup>50</sup> Free spaces are for Evans and Boyte (1986:xvi) “public spaces in the community (...) in which people are able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue”, they are “schools for democracy”, ranging from small feminist group discussions to black churches during the civil right movement to liberated zones of the independence movement. Their communalities lie in their roots in community, connected to everyday life, their autonomy and their quasi public character (Evans and Boyte, 1986).

<sup>51</sup> Polletta (1999) identifies transmovement, indigenous and prefigurative structures. The first type (transmovement) is characterized by activists linked across a wide geographic area with contacts in a variety of organizations, detached from national political scenarios and not well-positioned and develop mobilizing frames and to recruit. The second (indigenous) are normally not oppositional, but central to people’s daily lives and important for mobilization and local recruitment. Finally prefigurative structures are created in ongoing movements, they are explicitly political and oppositional and they prefigure the society the movement is seeking to build through for example horizontal relationship. They help sustain members’ commitment to the cause and can provide services such as healthcare and food, but they can have difficulty surviving over time because of the egalitarian ethics that inspire them.

mobilize beyond the bounds of the locality, and characterized by dense associational ties because of their centrality to people's daily lives.

Polletta's tripartite distinction of free spaces has nevertheless not been much further elaborated and investigated<sup>52</sup>. Recently Polletta and Kretschmer (2013:479) remarked that little is known about the prefigurative structure of free spaces. In general, the free spaces' perspective has been devoid of much reflection on spatial connections: "it is the character of the ties that are established or reinforced in those settings, rather than the physical space itself, that the free space concept has sometimes captured" (Polletta, 1999: 25): "free spaces in this sense provide not so much a space as an idiom for formulating opposition" (Polletta and Kretschmer, 2013: 478).

In the next section I will engage with the human geography literature on social movements and space, which will help to build a theoretical framework combining prefigurative politics and the production of spaces, in a renewed approach to forge the concept of prefigurative territory.

#### **4.2.3 Social movements and the production of space**

The "spatial turn" in critical social theory (Soja 1989) occurred with a time lag in social movement studies. While until recently several authors have denounced theorizations of social movements "as if they develop on the head of a pin" (Miller and Martin, 2000; Nicholls, 2007; Martin & Miller, 2003), in the last twenty years, there has been an increasing effort to interrogate the spatialities of social movements, i.e. deciphering the "ways geography matters to the imaginaries, practices and trajectories" of social movements (Leitner et al., 2008). Recent works have argued for analyses and methodological frameworks able to take into account the co-implication and dynamic articulation of different spatialities, against previous "intellectual fashion cycles" privileging one particular spatiality at the expense of others (Jessop et al., 2008; Leitner et al., 2008). "One-dimensionalism", conflating all aspects of socio-spatial relations under the rubric of a specific spatiality, whether it be place, network, territory or scale, was charged to offer a partial viewpoint on the importance of geography, at the expense of thicker descriptions and explanations of complex phenomena (Jessop et al., 2008; Leitner et al., 2008). Other authors have nevertheless stressed that "which spatialities are

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<sup>52</sup> Exceptions are Futrell & Simi (2004), Lowe (2007), and Leach and Haunss (2008).

most relevant is a context dependent question, depending upon the positionality of movement actors as well as the researcher” (Nicholls et al., 2013). While I recognize that multiple spatialities intervene and are involved in social movements, in this article I focus especially on place and territory through the concept of prefigurative territory, even though I also consider issues of networks.

Two conceptions of place dominate within the literature on the geographies of social movements (Nicholls, 2009), a territorial and a relational one: while the first emphasizes the groundedness and meaningful function of places for social relations and identities (e.g. Dirlik, 1999; Escobar, 2001; Gibson-Graham, 2002; Agnew, 1987), the latter stresses the contingent interactions of diverse actors (both sociologically and geographically), hence highlighting the role of networks (e.g. Marston et al., 2005; Massey, 2004; Featherstone, 2005, 2008). Place shapes subjectivities of people and enables the formation of epistemic communities (Nicholls, 2013; Martin, 2003) it provides “favourable geographic conditions” for the development of strong ties that are vital for enhancing collective action (Nicholls, 2009). The situatedness of contention, nevertheless, does not prevent “social movement spaces” (Nicholls, 2009) from emerging from networked activist places, hence the two conceptions of place should not be perceived as antagonistic. The concept of “social movement space” resonates with McFarlane's (2009) notion of translocal assemblage, signifying composites of place-based social movements exchanging ideas, knowledge, practices and resources across sites. Similarly, for Escobar (2001) and Dirlik (1999), social movements are committed to the defense of place interweaving nature, cultural practices, and identity, while engaging in translocal, multi-scale networked oriented strategies. Specific places can assume particular importance within networks: rather than being a “non-place” of resistance, networks can be conceived for Routledge (2003) as “convergence spaces”, coalitions of (contested) place-specific social movements, multi-scalar terrains including both material and virtual places. Convergence spaces are seen by Routledge as a way of overcoming Harvey's (1996) concept of “militant particularism” of place-based resistance (ibid: 324), as “universal values are always embedded in, and emergent from, the local and concrete” (Routledge, 2003:237). The local is not simply a victim of global processes but has agency (Gibson-Graham, 2002; Massey, 2004), thus “progressive localism” is not merely defensive, as an outward looking place-based politics can feed into broader social and political movements aiming at transforming national and international policy frameworks (Featherstone et al., 2012). For (Cox, 1998) place-based groups can create inter-local “spaces of engagement” in which actors organize to secure the place-specific conditions out of material well-being and sense of

significance, hence engaging with centers of social power. In a relational construction of militant particularism, place-located activism can bring together different routes of political activity in which political identities and agency are constructed through practices of engagement with geographies of power relations and cooperation with different subaltern groups (Featherstone, 2003, 2005, 2008). Hence for Featherstone a dynamic topography of relations between place-based political activities and political imaginaries emerges, which contrasts with a bounded notion of place. A bounded notion of place is for him the driving force reproducing the dichotomy local and global, particular and universal, lived and abstract, place and space<sup>53</sup> (ibid). While the local/global binary has been criticized by other authors such as Massey (2004), Dirlik (1999), Gibson-Graham (2002), and Merrifield (1993), the latter three advocate a territorial conception of place. Dirlik (1999:155)'s (ecological) conception of place, for example, is grounded in ecology and topography, in which "porosity of boundary is not the same as the abolition of boundaries". Boundaries are neither natural nor fixed, but "their construction is an important aspect of the active material and cultural production of place by groups of people" (Escobar, 2001). Territories are very important in the "society in movement" (Zibechi, 2012), that are particular territorialized social relations characterized by autonomy (also from the market) and community, where appropriated territories are linked to the movement that institutes and characterizes them on the base of the social relations practiced. For Gibson-Graham (2002; 2006) place can be the site of becoming, of practices of resubjection through alternative economic institutions.

In Lefebvre's framework (1991), both space and place are embodied in material processes and are "grounded". The production of place and space is a deeply political and social conflict, which stems from the intrinsic - "inscribed in place" (Merrifield, 1993:521) - tension between the usage and appropriation of place for social purposes (use value), and the domination of place through private ownership for economic growth and commercial purposes (exchange value). For Lefebvre what characterizes advanced capitalism organization of space is abstract space, which is fragmented (into discrete units that can be privatised and commodified), homogenous (flattening out spatial diversity and imposing a logic of exchangeability), and hierarchical - where the position in such hierarchy is the product of the distribution of power, wealth, resources and information (Butler, 2012). Nevertheless, for Lefebvre abstract space never achieves absolute dominance, and "carries within itself the seeds of a new kind of

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<sup>53</sup> This notion of place emerges for example in Harvey's accounts as well as in Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2000) or Castell's *The rise of network society* (1996) and *the City and the grassroots* (1983).

space” (Lefebvre, 1991:52): what he calls ‘differential space’, which emerges through appropriation. Differential space sets itself against homogeneity and fragmentation, accentuating social differences and restoring unity to the “functions, elements and moments of social practice”: “it will put an end to those localizations which shatter the integrity of the individual body, the social body, the corpus of human needs, and the corpus of knowledge” (ibid).

The encampments forged the Lefebvrian “differential space”, in which the peculiarities and differences of human social life are accentuated and integrity of human needs affirmed (Dhaliwal, 2012). Dhaliwal (2012) wonders whether the differential space created through occupation might develop into the Lefebvrian “counter-space”, “alternative spatial arrangements and practices that function as a point of possible rupture in the existing system” (Dhaliwal, 2012:266). While explosions of squares and street occupation and political festivity provide moments of social contestation, the reappropriation of space requires a more lasting transformation of everyday life (Butler, 2012). Emancipatory political tendencies should aim towards the self-management of space, through the development of counter-spaces, “initially utopian alternatives to actually existing ‘real’ space” (Lefebvre, 1991:349) that insert themselves into spatial reality “against the against the Eye and the Gaze, against quantity and homogeneity, against power and the arrogance of power, against the endless expansion of the ‘private’ and of industrial profitability; and against specialized spaces and a narrow localization of function” (ibid:382). Counter-spaces can be thought as “the mark of a differential space” (Shields 1999:184)”, whose production involves and requires imagination to reclaim our society as a lived project (Merrifield 2006:120).

The re-appropriation of space is hence part of a process of social change against capitalism and spaceless globalization, and this takes the form of “self-management or workers’ control of territorial and industrial entities, communities and communes, elite groups striving to change life and to transcend political institution and parties (Lefebvre, 1991:392). Self-management is a strategy where management of social space is collective and controlled by the base, where the interested parties intervene, manage and control it and determine their social needs (Lefebvre, 2009:193). Self-management is both the means and the end (Lefebvre, 2009:194), involves liberation of everyday life in revolutionary struggles (Butler, 2012) and should concretize and extend to all levels and sectors (Lefebvre, 2001).

#### 4.2.4 Prefigurative territories

Prefigurative politics emerge in the contestations and practices of everyday life, producing political spaces that are processual and in tension between the present and future, living the values they would wish to be hegemonic, and producing the radical imagination rooted in the process of becoming (Goyens, 2009; Ince, 2012). Following Lefebvre, such contestation should produce and create new forms of space: “‘to change life’, ‘to change society’, these phrases mean nothing if there is no production of an appropriated space” (Lefebvre, 2009:186). From this perspective I propose a prefigurative understanding of territory and place, in a way that opens the spatial and political imaginations to radical alternatives (Ince, 2012). As noted by Wright (2010:232), “there is little systematic elaboration of how to actually ‘build the new society within the shell of the old’ and how this can lead to a systemic transformation”. While it is not possible to analyse how interstitial transformation can lead to systemic changes as these have not come yet, I investigate the role that occupying public space can play in the transformation of social relations, which can contribute to the broader contestation of the existing order and to the actualization of alternatives. Particularly, I propose that within a social movement’s development, the creation of prefigurative territories can evolve from the first two dimensions of prefigurative politics, the means-ends consistency and the proleptic enactment of the future, to the third more powerful building of alternatives, in a way that resonates with Badiou’s (2012) fidelity to the inaugural event. Prefigurative territories are marked by the spatial production of imaginaries and new types of spatial relations. While the Plaza Catalunya displayed the first two components of prefigurative politics, and the movement’s radical imaginaries were expressed only symbolically through the synecdochic-proleptic dimension of prefigurative politics, the following cases materialised alternative imaginaries through the building of alternatives in different shades of intensity (less so in the urban gardens). The radical imaginaries were hence not just symbolized, but concretely implemented with a transformational perspective: while the synecdochic dimension of the square involved building the future in the present, the other cases gradually focused on building the present towards the future. The passage from proleptic status to the building of alternatives is connected to the role of experimentation. The transformational effects of building alternatives is ensured by the emphasis of the movement on proliferation and demonstration.



This movement from the first two to the third dimension of prefigurative politics also parallels Lefebvre's passage from differential space to counter-spaces. In Lefebvre's differential space differences are accentuated and unity of the functions of the social body, the corpus of human needs and knowledge, is produced. Counter-spaces involve a more enduring transformation of everyday life through self-management, direct democracy, and determination of new social needs. The 'building of alternatives' dimension of prefigurative territories and Maeckelbergh's (2011a) point on the strategic dimension of horizontality can indeed answer Polletta's (1999) concern about the transient character of prefigurative structures. As Maeckelbergh (2011a) has shown, there is no tension between prefiguration and consequentialism: the means-ends consistency expressed in horizontal decision making does not translate into a rejection of organization (Breines, 1982). It is assembly-based organization (as opposed to hierarchical), the direct democracy of which relies on principles of rotation and delegation (in contrast to representation) and is not only effective, but also strategic. Such strategy stems not only from collectively determining the goals (as Maeckelbergh argues), but also in the vision of a transformational change as embedded in prefigurative politics. Moreover, although the cases analysed are very young and it is still too early to say, it would seem that when this dimension is activated, prefigurative politics produce territories (and not just free spaces) that are enduring. The building of alternatives is itself made possible by the open character of prefigurative politics, its outward-lookingness that contests the existing hegemonic order as opposed to being 'insular enclaves' (Dhaliwal, 2012). In other words, the concept of prefigurative territories as intended here allows to overcome the distinction between the territorial and the relational conception of place dominating the literature on the geographies of social movements (Nicholls, 2009): prefigurative politics are grounded in the territory as a site of becoming through practices of resubjection and the creation of alternative economic institutions (Gibson-Graham, 2006), but are contemporaneously marked by a transformational perspective aimed at upscaling through networking.

Finally, this paper argues that three main radical imaginaries are produced by the Indignados movement: autonomy, commons and ecologism/sufficiency.

## 4.3 Case studies

### 4.3.1 The Square: Plaza Catalunya

*“The Square is a new social base. There is a real life in common. It is a democratic conduct of human being. The square is a model, and here the debate in search of alternatives starts. We invite you to the debate for a new alternative”* (participant of the square at the General Assembly (GA), 2 June).

*“We have to widen the movement to other places. We changed the face of Plaza Catalunya, but we can change the face of all Catalunya and of all Spain”* (participant of the square at the GA, 23 May)

Following the attempt to evict the first “acampada” in Plaza del Sol (Madrid), in Barcelona the first occupation started on 16 May, with 150 people taking part in the assembly, and announcing “the Square proclaims itself as a free and pacific space”. The first assemblies were “very improvised [talks], of people going up to the microphone and shouting words” (I13:17), a car was put in the middle of the square to provide energy, with a stage attached to it. After initial moments of chaotic spatial confusion, wherein the Square “*looked like a Moroccan ‘souk’, with so many people looking for something although there was not much to search for*” (I24:471), the central part of the square was symbolically divided into three spaces conceived to be “open forum for discussions”: Tahrir, Iceland and Palestine. The newly constituted “General Assembly” (GA) would have been the organ where issues mostly linked to Square management were to be decided<sup>54</sup>, while autonomous commissions multiplied day by day, reflecting the increased needs of a swelling encampment (see Figure 1).

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<sup>54</sup> The General Assembly had an informational function for those issues different from the Document of Minimal Demands (discussed in the Subcommittee of Minimal Demands, itself part of the Content Commission) or which did not involve the Square as a whole. All other issues were to be decided by commissions, autonomous organs. A newly born “facilitation fleet”, with people coming from previous social movements and social centers, facilitated the assemblies of both the General Assembly and of the various Commissions.



Figure 1. The spatial organization of the Square occupation.

The synecdochic dimension of enacting the future desired world in the present was made real through the first commissions and tents, which were linked to the social reproduction of the Square. The Square gradually turned into a “psychomagic” differential space riddled with “imagination and creativity” (I19:616), a micro-cosmos of symbolized alternatives combining and integrating individual psychophysical needs with social needs, artistic and cultural expressions.

The **Kitchen** commission provided food to all with voluntary contributions, avoiding the use of plastic dishes for ecological reasons. From the first days the Environmental Commission had demanded an “ecological acampada”. Recycling tasks (with 6 recycling bins), the cleaning of the Square as well as the organization of events on ecological issues were arranged by the **Environment** Commission, although collaboration by every participant was sought. The **Economics** commission managed the money collected through donations, while the **Infrastructure** Commission took care of the proper setting up of the technical facilities, from the electric systems needed for the GA - “ecological electricity” through cycling

dynamos and solar panels was preferred in a second phase – to the organization of bathrooms. The **Activities** commission coordinated the organization of speeches, concerts and other events taking place in the square, and set up a **library** furnished with donated books (part of the network of social libraries), a **cinema discussion** space, and an art gallery with canvas and sculptures.<sup>55</sup> The **Communication** Commission transmitted the information on the acampada through social media and the website, where assemblies were streamed by the Audiovisual Commission for “didactic reasons”. The **Education** commission included a children’s playground, educational activities in the square and discussions and actions against public education. It also set up a study room, next to the **Theatre** tent, so that “students can study here in the square”<sup>56</sup>. The **Health** Commission comprised first aid, natural therapies and psychological help, and released many communications during the GA about healthy conduct. Of course cohabitation in the square also involved conflicts stemming from the management of everyday life, hence a **Living Together** Commission was created with the function of preventing and detecting conflicts.<sup>57</sup> Social reproduction also involved sessions of laughing therapy and massages, performed in the **Harmony Space**, next to the newly born **Urban Garden**. The acampada was also a terrain of emotional connection and discharge. As Veronica avowed, “*the square was “emotions with legs... it was a space for experimenting, to try, to relieve yourself... where everyone brought to the table the emotions she was carrying...”* (I79, focus group). Poetry reading was one of the most emotional moments, featuring poets such as Enric Casasses and Blanca Llum Vidal.

Following Lefebvre, integral unity was established between the corpus of knowledge and corpus of social needs. The social production of space resulted in the spatial production of imaginaries as articulated in theoretical as well as practical dimensions. In fact the first-born commissions charged with the organization of everyday life in the Square – Health, Education, Environment, Outraged Feminists, Economy, Kitchen, Health, Informatics - were interestingly replicated and paralleled in a few days in the Content Commission (see Figure 1): while the former were focused on the more practical level and social reproduction functions (e.g. the Environment Commission took care of cleaning the square), the latter involved discussions on a more general, system level, often dealing with the role of national

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<sup>55</sup> It also organized some events outside the camp, in the city, such as a “bicycle riding”, the demonstration “fewer bankers and more gardeners” in support of cuts of public gardeners, and for the shutdown of nuclear plants

<sup>56</sup> Minutes of the Acampada can be found at <https://acampadabcn.wordpress.com/documents/actes-de-lassemblea-general/>

<sup>57</sup> Other Commissions included: the **International** Commission which translated documents in tens of different languages, and contacted other camps as they multiplied across the world, while the **Extension** Commission connected the square with other struggles in the city and beyond. The **Legal** commission was charged with legal support in case of eviction by the police, as well as providing information with regards to different behaviours in the Square.

policies in the various topics, producing sub-commissions manifestos (e.g. the Environment Sub-commission of the Contents Commission dealt with environmental problems and policies).

The (social) production of space was a collective decision-making process, subject to the approval of the GA, as it is evident from the case of the acampada garden, explained in the next section.<sup>58</sup>

#### 4.3.1.1. The acampada garden

The urban garden was started on the sixth day of the acampada, as the flowerbed had been stepped on and destroyed by the assemblies (Figure 2). The garden was first started by a dozen people coming from self-managed urban gardens in the city, but many people with no previous experience joined the experiment. While seeking approval for its existence from the Action Commission and the Environmental Commission, some concerns were raised by people from those two commissions. There were complaints that an abuse had been committed because of the modification of the urban property. Similarly the Legal Commission raised the risk of a potential eviction because of the illegal behavior perpetrated. The Garden Group hence decided to prepare a manifesto and write a letter<sup>59</sup> to motivate the usefulness of their initiative, arguing that the garden was an opportunity to reflect on the public space and to experiment with self-management, demonstrating that “*we are capable of self-managing something of what we demand*“. They wished to promote local consumption and the conservation of indigenous species, while retaining a pedagogic function and engendering a “rurban” dynamic, “*making possible another city, a city with more gardens and less banks, with more common spaces and less privatizing speculation*”.

The garden was synecdochically prefigurative, “*a symbolic space of reflection on urban agro-ecology and on the necessity to change the agro-food model*”. Through an act of disobedience (I41), it represented the coherency of generating the Square’s own food through a “*joke, putting gardens whose future was evidently questioned, in the center of Plaza Catalunya*”

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<sup>58</sup> Even the proposal to camp on a tree (a ‘bio-construction house’), proposed by some people of the squatted social centre and community garden Can Masdeu passed through the General Assembly, and was accepted on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of acampada.

<sup>59</sup> The letter was prepared by a person from the squatted social centre-community garden Can Masdeu but was right after adopted by the whole group. See <https://hortdignebcn.wordpress.com/documents/%C2%BFque-hace-un-huerto-en-plaza-catalunya/>

(I19:616). Through a proper “symbolology of urban garden”, the square’s politics of space condensed and spatialises alternative radical imaginaries:

*“Plaza Catalunya was a micro-cosmos of alternatives, there had to be a garden to explain that we had to eat what we cultivate, that the power we have is also to decide what we eat and produce, no? That we could also come full circle in the Square, produce what we would eat in the collective kitchen.”* (I40:132).

In three of the following large demonstrations in the city (including the world demonstration on 15 October), either mobile or fixed gardens were built. But more importantly, following one of its objectives to spread the information of urban agroecology, it engendered the creation of new gardens in the city or strengthened those already in place and their interconnections, as analysed in the following section.

During the one month-square occupation, it became clear that the movement would have decentralized, with assemblies continuing to take place at the neighborhood level, periodically meeting in spaces of coordination, given the limitation of decision-making processes linked to a large GA. Emphasis was put on the ‘creation of alternatives’ that such a second phase would have involved: change would have to be stirred at the local level. The Square was *“a very cohesive factor because in the end you were living side by side and so it served to strengthened a network of mutual understanding”* (I50: 79), thus it propelled many of the cases explained below.



**Figure 2.** The Plaza Catalunya urban garden

### **4.3.2 The urban gardens of Barcelona**

The Plaza Catalunya garden generated two spin-offs. One was an incipient network of self-managed urban gardens of Barcelona, involving exchange of information, tools and autochthonous seeds, joint meetings and a new website<sup>60</sup>. The other one was the creation of new self-managed gardens, either as singular experiences (analysed in this section) or as part of broader projects (analysed in the following cases).

In Poble Nou the newly constituted garden commission of the 15M neighborhood assembly occupied an empty lot in October 2011, hence creating the first outraged (‘indignado’) garden for about 15-20 family units. Core motivations behind its creation were linked to ‘communitarian interests’ (communal self-management and sharing) and to the denunciation of housing speculation and the useless evictions it caused in the neighbourhoods. Indeed several families had been evicted from their rented apartments as the building had been bought out by developers seeking to gentrify the area and capture higher rents. However, in the end construction works were not pursued because the economic bubble had burst. As an increasing number of neighbours wanted to join the garden, the garden commission decided to

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<sup>60</sup> <https://hortdignebcn.wordpress.com/>



occupy another lot, for 30 families. A third and a fourth one would follow in the same logic, although the fourth one was eventually walled in (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Poblenou indignat garden. Source: personal photo.

Politicization and efforts to keep the radical imaginaries alive were continually fought for from within, as the projects ceaselessly searched for ways to open up to the wider neighbourhood against the drift towards ‘green enclaves’. Such efforts were necessary as ‘opening up’ had become a source of tensions, due to the fact that many new, non-indignant participants, lacked political motivations to protest against gentification, and did not share ‘communitarian interests’ linked to collective self-management. Rather, they merely wanted “a piece of land to cultivate” (I44:25). An analogous tension emerged in the first indignat garden, following the replacement of some old 15M members with new neighbors similarly uninterested in participating in garden assemblies and community life. Hence a “Handbook of the Good Orchardier” was produced in the first indignat garden, to ensure that only people really taking care of the orchard and participating to the assemblies could stay:

*“some people thought ‘ah look I can do whatever’, well no, because we are a group and what we want is not to eat tomatoes, this is not the most important thing. It is to have a collective project to denounce the amount of empty spaces that banks have, which are not being built because there is a crisis, and in the meantime the neighbors could have a more pleasant use instead of having it destroyed” (I47: 86).*



Those people sharing such a common “indignant” project are “*those that come to the garden to enjoy it with others (...) to have a project with neighbors and this is something concrete of what an assembly is, this is the idea of farming we have*” (I47:134).

An analogous dynamic was engendered in the Xino Garden (in the Raval neighborhood), which was born before 15M, but was revived with new participants after the Square occupation. One year after the Square, participants decided to start a garden dissemination campaign aimed at “opening up” the garden to the neighborhood. Nevertheless, the new group of people that consequently joined the garden was not familiar with and was not much interested in taking part in garden assemblies. They merely wanted to enjoy a pleasant neighborhood space. This created “a clash” between old and new participants: the two visions collided over “*who is going to impose the vision we have about the garden, and whose garden is this*” (I40 743). As Violeta avowed, “*we abuse the expression “we want to open the spaces to the neighborhood”; and when they become really open, you say “I leave” ... the ghetto is also great.. or else, it is good to combine the two things, or otherwise have it clear that you are going to do an ant’s work: dissemination and much patience*”. In the end after an adaptation phase and a thorough explanation of the way the assembly process worked, some confluence was found.

Communitarian gardens are spaces for sharing, encountering, experimentation and everyday politics, founded upon the continuous appropriation and transformation of space. While the long term objective is to supply the city through peri-urban agriculture, for many people the reason of producing food is a secondary motivation for joining the garden. Hence the gardens’ synecdochic dimension is at least as important as their building of an alternative dimension. The communitarian gardens at any rate do not offer sufficient food for families, and in some cases as in the Xino garden, food cultivation was not possible as a result of contamination by previous uses (in contrary to other gardens they did not bring in new soil). Rather than being ‘productive spaces’, gardens are hence ‘agro-cultural spaces’<sup>61</sup>, where people can enjoy both communitarian dynamics linked to sharing, and cultural activities organized and the pleasure offered by a green space in the middle of the city. They display a “non productive playful dimension” for all ages: “*in the summer, you come here in the afternoon. The afternoon passes like that without you even realizing, and you have neither consumed nor been in front of the TV watching rubbish*” (I42:117, Fort Pienc garden). These spaces are green squares

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<sup>61</sup> Activities organized in gardens span from outdoor cinemas and documentary screenings to the typical Catalan “calçotada” (convivial barbecues of a local variety of onion), to jam sessions and concerts, children’s activities, poetry reading, to neighborhood cooperative meetings.

built by their own neighbors, as *“you decide everything about space, really. In fact the garden transforms itself every year, elements and things keep changing, and this, when you produce spaces, means that you appropriate more of it too, and that you want to take care of it and you feel it is yours”* (I40: 533, Xino garden). Self-managed gardens usually display a system combining communal areas and individual lots, but even individual lots imply sharing, and decisions are normally taken in the garden assemblies. Gardens can also be spaces for self-employment and mutual support for those uneconomically disadvantaged.<sup>62</sup> For some they are spaces for “everyday politics”, places for consciousness raising, where you can access news and information that you would not be able to through mainstream media. Whilst often born as a means of denouncing housing speculation, however they are also at risk of becoming self-insulating and losing their critique potential: *“they are so pleasant that we forget that we also need to confront what is happening in Raval for example, no? With all the gentrification”* (I40:465).

### 4.3.3. Recreant Cruïlles

Recreant Cruïlles is a self-managed project born from the Action Commission of the 15M neighbourhood assembly of Esquerra de l’Eixample<sup>63</sup>. It is located in the so-called “Germanetes Space”, a re-activated empty urban lot, under cession of use by the municipality.

The 15M neighborhood assembly of Esquerra de l’Eixample began meeting in front of the seat of the Esquerra Eixample Neighbours Association, in the summer of 2011. As Ivan (I69:10) noted, the problem in this very central neighborhood is its weak associational tissue: *“there is no public space, no central location (...), so we can consider as a mark of identity the Association of Neighbors”*. This was a “very symbolic act” (I74: 23), which set forth a very peculiar development, in which the 15M assembly and the Association would establish joint collaboration leading to increased political incisiveness.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> In the Xino garden for example, an unemployed person was financially supported through the money raised by event organization, while some unemployed Pakistani women are in charge of cooking and managing the bar when activities are organized.

<sup>63</sup> Esquerra de l’Eixample is the second district of Barcelona, stretching along its centre, and with the highest population density.

<sup>64</sup> This collaboration would have led on the one hand to some sort of “regeneration” of the association, thanks to the participation of the 15M participants, and on the other to a political incisiveness of the assembly through the interlocutory capacity of the association. The Neighbours Association, an actor that played a fundamental role during the democracy transition years (Castells 1983; Borja, 1975) had indeed become, paralleling a general trend at the national level, an

The idea of self-managing the “Germanetes space”, an inaccessible 5500 m<sup>2</sup> lot left empty since 2001, emerged in October 2011, during a workshop organized by the 15M neighborhood assembly at the annual neighborhood celebrations.<sup>65</sup> “Germanetes” means “sisters”, as the space was the former site of the Convent of the Sisters of the Poor, closed in 2001 and demolished in 2003 (see Figure 4). The lot was the property of the Clinic Hospital, but through an exchange agreement it became property of the municipality. In 2006 after negotiations with the Neighbors Association, modifications to the Barcelona Metropolitan General Plan were approved in which the municipality committed to build a set of public facilities on the lot<sup>66</sup>. In November 2011, the Recreant Cruïlles project was born as an autonomous project of the neighborhood assembly<sup>67</sup>. Given that the municipality had not started the works it had committed to, the Recreant Cruïlles group envisaged the self-management of that urban lot, at least until planned public facilities were built.



**Figure 4.** The Germanetes empty urban lot before appropriation by Recreant Cruïlles (the lot in the centre in the right hand picture). Sources: el Periòdic and google maps.

The Germanetes space was chosen by the Recreant Cruïlles project for its appealing strategic position, and the wider effects upon the neighbourhood that were envisioned. Lying at the intersection of Avenue Comte Borrell and Avenue Consell de Cent (see Figure 4), it had already been the object of a demonstration for its pedestrianization in 2003 by “Camí Amic”,

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institutionalized and not very dynamic associational structure, with a relatively aged environment. A participant for example avowed that the Neighbours Association of Esquerra del'Eixample looked like a seniors' daycare.

<sup>65</sup> The workshop aimed to mapping the empty public lots of the neighborhood.

<sup>66</sup> The public facilities included a secondary school, a nursery school, a seniors' daycare, some public housing for old people, apartments with a social rent program for young people, and some private apartments.

<sup>67</sup> The project since the start nevertheless also included some people of the indignant assembly of the adjacent Sant Antoni neighbourhood.

an educational network of actors<sup>68</sup> that succeeded in converting Comte Borrell Street into a 30 km per hour avenue. Building on the previous Camí Amic initiative, and on failed commitments by the municipality to undertake the construction of public services, the self-management of the Germanetes space was envisaged as key to the pedestrianization of the two streets (Comte Borrell and Consell de Cent) in the longer term, with the potential to create a square at the intersection, i.e. precisely on the corner of the Germanetes space. The lot was seen as spatially conducive to the creation of an “urban weave” connecting five public schools, the library, and the cultural centre Teresa Pamies.<sup>69</sup> The group hence decided to work on consciousness-raising in the neighborhood. Public events, celebrations and participatory seminars<sup>70</sup> were organized not only to gain public attention over the empty lot and increase the activist membership, but also to involve the neighbours in participatory decision-making processes over what kind of projects could be implemented in the space.<sup>71</sup>

In fact while the group had been considering occupying the space, in spring 2012 the Empty Spaces Program was initiated by the municipality to foster “the development of public use and activities, of temporary character, of 19 empty spaces in the city of Barcelona”, including the Germanetes space<sup>72</sup>. The call foresaw the temporary cession of those spaces for a maximum period of three years but it involved only a part of the empty lot, 580 m<sup>2</sup>. The group decided to apply for the grant, conceiving it as a possibility for further expansion through “a Trojan horse” effect: “*we enter, we get the 500, and from those 500 m we are going to struggle to obtain the 5000.*” (I75:364). As juridical personality was needed, the group decided to become members of the Neighbours Association and to apply for the call under the Neighbors Association’s juridical umbrella. This new membership also had a bearing on the results of the elections for President of the Neighbourhood Association of Esquerra de

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<sup>68</sup> Aiming at the promotion of a “safe path” of kids to their schools, Camí Amic included the Association of Mothers and Fathers of schools students (A.M.P.A), three Neighbors Associations, the public library and the public sports centre.

<sup>69</sup> The Recreant Cruilles project was also inspired by the vision of 19<sup>th</sup> century urbanist Ildefons Cerdà i Sunyer, planner of the neighborhood, whose original ideas foreseeing the pedestrianization of the crossroad at the centre of each “super-block” and the related perpendicular streets, had failed to be implemented in the neighborhood. His ideas had been captured in the name Recreant Cruilles, meaning “re-creating crossroads”, but at the same time, through the differently highlighted “creant illes”, also “creating blocks”. This urban planning perspective was certainly at least partially owed to the enlivening presence of a professor of civil engineering and urban planning within the group since its very inception. Previously a technician at the Urban Ecological Agency, and working on a project focused on pedestrianization, he avowed: “*I said to myself: I am going to be active here in the neighborhood [assembly] because if I don’t succeed it as a technician of the municipality, I am going to make it with the neighbours*” (I74:231).

<sup>70</sup> After the first participatory workshop organized in the Joan Miró Park during the neighborhood yearly celebrations in October 2011, two other public participatory workshops were organized in the Golferichs civic centre in February and March 2012, each one with the attendance of about 60-80 people.

<sup>71</sup> Creative protest actions and artistic exhibitions/performances ranged from a 24 hour march making turns around the empty urban plot to turning the Germanetes outside walls into a protest wall, with posters with activists’ pictures and writings about their desired project to implement in the space. The video of the event called “Inside out” in collaboration is available here: <https://vimeo.com/77424795>

<sup>72</sup> See <http://www.bcnparticipa.net/processos/detall.php?id=22>.



l'Eixample. The new president, Lluís Rabell, subsequently became the President of the Federation of Neighbours of Barcelona.



**Figure 5.** The setting of Recreant Cruïlles. Source: ara.cat



**Figure 6.** The inauguration of Recreant Cruïlles. Source: personal photo.



**Figure 7.** An assembly of one of the commissions of Recreant Cruilles. Source: personal photo.



**Figure 8.** The monthly peasants' market organized in the streets adjacent to Recreant Cruilles. Source: Recreant Cruilles facebook page.

The final document of the application was the result of the confluence of diverse actors engendered by participatory processes: 15M movements, traditional movements such as the Neighbors Association, the Association of Students' Mothers and Fathers (AMPAS) and the



Camí Amic, and environmental networks and actors both at the neighborhood and the city level<sup>73</sup>. As Toni (I75:187) avowed, “*the project was never thought of as a personal project, but as a neighborhood project*”.<sup>74</sup> Project design included an urban garden, a climbing wall, a polyvalent space, a meeting space and a seminar space (Figure 5). In November 2013, after the municipality’s preparatory works on the lot, the group was able to enter the space, and in January 2014 the inauguration<sup>75</sup> took place (see Figure 6). The assembly-based process is organized in a general assembly and several commissions<sup>76</sup> (Figure 7), among which the Public Space Commission was incorporated inside the Urbanism Committee of the Neighbors Association, in order to boost the efforts on urban planning changes upon the municipality.

#### 4.3.3.1. Re-creating urbanism

The Recreant Cruïlles group aimed to create a self-managed green square in an “alienated neighborhood”<sup>77</sup>, conceived as a first step towards a wider reconfiguration of the neighborhood through pedestrianization of the adjacent streets and the creation of the first (real) square at the crossroad, as well as through ‘progressive re-appropriations’: “*we will continue with the struggle to have all the 5000 m and subsequently the pedestrianization and other buildings and sites in the neighborhood that belong to the municipality or private entities but which are not being used, which should belong to the neighborhood*” (I71:148). Participants also envisioned a bottom-up system of participatory urban planning, for example in the construction of public facilities in the lot.

For many participants self-management exemplifies the shift, typical of 15M, to a proactive attitude that instead of solely making demands to the state, acts for its concrete actualization: “*it is already from protest to proposal and from proposal to action, and I think that it is this*

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<sup>73</sup> These actors included: Projecte Respira, Idensitat, straddle3, CST (Centre de Sostenibilitat Territorial); PTP (Plataforma per al Transport Públic); Associació AraBosc; CREAL (Centre de Recerca en Epidemiologia Ambiental), BACC (Bicicleta Club de Catalunya), Catalunya Camina, Centre de Debats Urbans sobre Resiliència (Transició Sostenible; URBNet; IntraScapeLab-UPC).

<sup>74</sup> The participatory process hence meant the inclusion of many different projects ranging from a “popup library” to horticulture workshops, conferences on social economy and urban pollution, to children’s activities, artistic projects such as “Open walls”, the Eixample Observatory on social and environmental resilience etc.

<sup>75</sup> The space was inaugurated with some artistic exhibitions provided by the project Idensitat on 25 January 2014 and was endowed with an urban garden, a meeting space, a large geodesic dome (where to organize meeting, concerts and other activities during rainy days) and a warehouse provided by the Straddle association, a bathroom area, and a painted wall, with the plan of building the other spaces from the climbing wall to the daycare space etc.

<sup>76</sup> The Garden, Public space, Activities, Communication, Education, Infrastructure, Economy, Art, and Climbing Wall Commissions hold weekly general assemblies.

<sup>77</sup> As many participants affirmed, the neighborhood is one of the most populated in Barcelona, and with the lowest green space per capita, only 1,37 m<sup>2</sup> per person, which leads to a lower life expectancy than in other parts of Barcelona.

*qualitative jump, which we are posing*” (I69:38). Participants remarked on the truly public character of the space: it is open to everyone who wants to make use of it - as the entrance door faced outward with a large illustrated sign, “this space is yours” – and anyone can propose activities to be organized, if they are compatible with the project’s aims. They stress how the absence of private utility makes the space successful: *“here people devote a lot of time and energies disinterestedly, but as it is such a collective project, it works, because people disinterestedly do many things for free”* (I73:97).

Recreant Cruïlles is a micro-intervention and ‘experimental space’ aimed at experimenting and demonstrating that “a different model of a city” is possible: *“we don’t know what is going to happen. What we do know is that we now want this space for thinking about the neighbourhood and try to reverse some dynamics occurring in the neighbourhood.”* (I75:170). For example, its objective of pedestrianization is experimented with whenever possible in daily activities: *“we constantly have as an objective, in the Fiesta Mayor or for example, in tomorrow’s celebrations, to close the street to traffic, to gain the street for the use and benefit of the pedestrian, that is to demonstrate not so much discursively, but in the daily practice to occupy space and demonstrate that it is indeed possible, and furthermore to experiment with what this would imply if it was really pedestrianized”* (I69:34). Along this line, the permaculture garden within Recreant Cruïlles is also conceived of as a symbolic tool for thinking about another “consumption and food model”, it holds an experimental and a pedagogic function linked to consciousness-raising about food sovereignty.<sup>78</sup> Flowerpots were placed outside the Germanetes lot, around the street’s trees, to *“appropriate the space in a natural way, as a further place from where to claim urban ecology”* (I67:31). In the central part of the garden are cultivated vegetables, used for collective celebrations, such as the popular ‘paella’ organized during the monthly Market of the Peasants. The latter, organized jointly with the Network of Solidarity Consumption, is managed by peri-urban organic agro-ecological peasants selling products on the streets around the Germanetes space, which are closed to traffic for the entire day (see Figure 8).

Nevertheless, the confluence of different movements and actors stemming from the open participatory processes also implied some subjacent unresolved divergences over the long term purpose of the Recreant Cruïlles project. While the Recreant Cruïlles group recognized that public facilities were needed in the neighborhood, they wanted the lot to become a green

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<sup>78</sup> The communitarian garden grows Mediterranean plants, surrounded with medicinal and aromatic plants. It features some plants deemed to favour biodiversity as they attract butterflies. Participants only make use of autochthonous seeds, and few plants were planted in the outside part of the fence delimiting the 500 m, as a symbolic claim of the intention to seize all of the lot.



area, and eventually to build the public facilities in another empty building or lot, as there was no need for constructing some facilities anew<sup>79</sup>. Other actors coming from more traditional movements (e.g. Neighbours Associations or Camí Amic) supporting Recreant Cruïlles instead perceived the project only as a temporary solution until public facilities were built. As the President of the FAVB avowed, “*the idea is to have a general tension within society so that the administration builds what it has to build*” (I78: 146), and “*as soon as the required facilities are constructed, Recreant Cruïlles will leave the space*” (I68:130). It is not clear how these tensions are going to develop further, but looking at the case from a distance after the completion of fieldwork, it seems that Recreant Cruïlles’ vision has gained ground<sup>80</sup>.

#### 4.3.4. Ateneu Cooperatiu La Base

The cooperative Ateneu La Base was born ideationally at the end of 2012 from the ‘Cooperasec’ Commission of the 15M Poble Sec<sup>81</sup> assembly.<sup>82</sup> Cooperasec aimed at “*generating alternatives to the current economic system linked to the solidarity economy and cooperativism, at the local and community level*”<sup>83</sup>, and organized a cycle of workshops and debates between September 2012 and June 2013 on major cooperative projects at the city and neighborhood levels in diverse areas.<sup>84</sup> During Cooperasec events, collaboration between 15M participants and a few other activists coming from the student-squatting movement against the Bolonia process<sup>85</sup> gave birth to the project of La Base<sup>86</sup>, inaugurated in January

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<sup>79</sup> As a concrete example, the group often thought that the public facilities could be located in the nearby empty 12 floor private building, formerly owned by the Telefonica, a telecommunication multinational corporation, publically owned until the 90s.

<sup>80</sup> For example, in April 2015 a demonstration was organized against the construction of social housing apartments, claiming that “we want green communitarian spaces”, and that the building of new apartments was not necessary :”we think that there is too much housing stock in the area and that social housing apartments, which are necessary, could be obtained by expropriating those held by the banks” (see <https://recreantcruilles.wordpress.com/2015/04/19/volem-espais-verds-i-comunitaris-no-pisos-a-germanetes/>).

<sup>81</sup> Situated between Montjuïc Hill and Parallel Avenue, Poble Sec is part of third district of Barcelona, Sants-Montjuïc, the largest district of the city.

<sup>82</sup> The abstract idea of creating the Ateneu Cooperatiu La Base nevertheless first emerged in 2009-2010, in assemblies that sprung up in the Poble Sec neighborhood before the emergence of the 15M movement. A few years before the occupation of Plaza Catalunya, a number of smaller assemblies displaying different characteristics than the indignados assemblies had already emerged in neighbourhoods with a stronger activism background such as Sants, Poble Sec and Eixample Dreta. After the Plaza Catalunya experience, they converged into the 15M assemblies.

<sup>83</sup> Extract from the website <https://cooperasec.wordpress.com/que-es/>

<sup>84</sup> This cycle of events was an opportunity for getting to know the various cooperative experiences in the neighborhood, and was intended “*to be a way of motivating people that are unemployed, without future working prospects, and who wanted to build a real alternative to the actual situation*” (Pérez and Valldeoriola, 2013). The events maybe even contributed to the birth of new cooperatives in the neighborhood such as Babàlia (which will be part of La Base), El Petit Molinet and La Base itself, which nevertheless meant to be “a platform of different cooperatives and initiatives”, a “project of projects” (Pérez and Valldeoriola, 2013).

<sup>85</sup> Particularly, several people were linked to the squatting social centre-library “La Rimaia Free University”.

2014 (see Figures 9-11).



**Figure 9.** The inauguration of La Base.  
Source: personal photo



**Figure 10.** The setting of La Base at lunch time.  
Source: zonasec.cat



**Figure 11.** The setting of La Base (second floor). Source: personal photo.

As some of the participants came from a squatting background, they were conscious of not

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<sup>86</sup> Subsequently a few activists coming from two older social centres (located in the neighborhood in past years) joined the group: the Ateneu Libertari (anarchist social centre) between 1977 and the early 90s, and the Espai Obert, a group of 8 different collectives (from theatre to publishing, to ecological consumption and libertarian education), located in the neighborhood between 1995 and 2004 (Vehí and Serra, 2013), and later moving to the Sants neighborhood.

wanting a *"space dependent on the rhythm of the legal situation of the space"* (150:170), which would have acted as *"a brake for the projects, an obstacle for advancing"* (152:465). Hence they decided that *"even though we continued to question the private property regime"* (149:287), they would have resorted to renting.

The "core group" (the group that worked for the implementation of the project since its ideational stage) undertook a preliminary conspicuous effort to define the guiding principles and objectives of the project. The project aims to combine a synergy of three needs: the need to have a gathering space, the necessity of self-employment as part of a broader vision to create a self-managed economic infrastructure, and the intention to have a space from which to generate a strong political position. Five guiding principles were also defined: community, autonomy, equity, solidarity and permaculture. The words 'Ateneu' and 'cooperative' reconnect to the Catalan tradition of workers associationism between the mid-nineteenth century and the first decades of twentieth century. "Cooperative" also puts an emphasis on the making of a political alternative: *"cooperative meaning not waiting that the system will fall down or that someone has to tell us what we have to do, meaning to relate ourselves differently with work and the economy, and to start immediately to generate these alternatives, this is the germ of the project"* (149:17). 'Cooperative' also refers to values such as solidarity, mutual support, cooperation, and direct participation of every member in a common project.

La Base includes nine different projects, but is a collective project, sharing not only common objectives and principles, but also a common fund (reinvested in non-remunerative activities)<sup>87</sup>. The nine sub-projects are the following: the consumption cooperative La Seca<sup>88</sup>, the communitarian canteen La Igualitaria, the bar "Espai de Trobada", the collective Eines devoted to social communitarian intervention, the catering cooperative Barrinar, a computing science collective, the Popular spontaneous library<sup>89</sup>, the co-maternity and shared nursing

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<sup>87</sup> The common fund includes progressive percentages of the profits gained in the remunerative projects and individual members' monthly quotas (10 euros, but people who cannot pay are exonerated), and their commonly decided destination goes to investments into non remunerative projects such as the library or Babàlia, or collective activities: as summarized by Cristina, the purpose is "to create infrastructures" (150:219). The renting quota is paid by each remunerative collective. The maximum and minimum salaries are also decided in the assembly. Within that range, the higher the salary a collective pays, the higher the percentage the collective needs to pay to the common fund. The work done for non remunerative projects is instead voluntary, as in the case of the library.

<sup>88</sup> La Seca includes 40 families that self-provision food through a local organic farmer.

<sup>89</sup> The library includes 3000 books on topics ranging from cooperativism, to communitarian construction, to pedagogy. They used to belong to La Rimaia Free University

group Babàlia<sup>90</sup> and the Crafts ateneu, offering to provide knowledge and services on carpentry, blacksmith's, construction and electrician's works.<sup>91</sup> The Espai de trobada, La Seca, La Igualitaria and Barrinar are all agroecological cooperatives relying on the same organic farmer located in the outskirts of Barcelona. La Base also increasingly includes individuals not related to these projects - in May 2014 its members counted about 150. The space is also used by many other collectives not belonging to the core project.

La Base promotes a rich agenda of cultural and political activities<sup>92</sup> and develops several activities in synergy with the indignados assembly. One of these projects is the second-hand barter market "Trocasc". Another activity is the "Let's Stop the Parallel Plan" Platform, initiated at the beginning of 2014 and supported by more than 60 entities in the neighborhood that signed a common manifesto to protest against the new urban plans in the neighbourhood.<sup>93</sup> Another project is Altaveu, the first neighborhood paper journal, which focuses on "*projects that are much linked with this idea of generating another economic model*" (I53:213). Finally, a campaign is underway to obtain the cession of use of La Font Trobada Garden from the municipality<sup>94</sup>. The urban garden project is perceived as important within La Base's longer term transformational vision towards autonomy: "*food is one of the basic necessities we have to cover, [the garden] is close, so that it is at the greatest extent both coherent and resilient (...) and is linked to the (principles of) autonomy and permaculture*" (I48:40). As specified by Carlos (I51:222): "*to organize a conflict or a revolution, you have to have a garden, a bakery*".

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<sup>90</sup> Babàlia includes 30 families using free education principles, and is the only group not located in the Ateneu, as its space infrastructure needs are not compatible with the building's facilities. Given the difficulties of finding a space that could satisfy the needs of all the projects of La Base, Babàlia decided to be spatially separate while still being part of the core project: "*we break with the territorial connection requiring us to be in only one place, so we start to imagine that maybe it is possible... that La Base is not only an Ateneu, but a set of principles and way of functioning, that it could infect different sites, and also a form of productive activity of members of the projects of La Base, and the contributions of the members could also help to generate other projects beyond this space*" (I49:102).

<sup>91</sup> La Seca, La Igualitaria and Espai de Trobada share the kitchen, using it at different times of the day. It is also a freely accessible dining hall for 'non-customers'.

<sup>92</sup> These include conferences, documentaries, movies, debates, concerts, common lunches, play activities for children, "language exchanges" (time bank), and a political reading groups.

<sup>93</sup> The 'Parallel Plan' entails a remodeling of the main Parallel Avenue by strengthening its connection with strategic points of Barcelona and its touristic and gastronomic appeal, and is charged with further gentrifying and commodifying the public space in the neighborhood. Hence the platform was created to attempt to block or modify it by means of a participatory process which could take into consideration a set of specific urban planning demands developed by the platform itself. See for ex. <http://plaparalel.com/manifest-per-adherir-se-com-a-veina-vei-o-entitat-de-barri/>; <http://www.bcnparticipa.net/files/proces891361967256.pdf>; [http://www.eldiario.es/catalunya/Pla-Parallel-proxima-Marca-Barcelona\\_0\\_249525671.html](http://www.eldiario.es/catalunya/Pla-Parallel-proxima-Marca-Barcelona_0_249525671.html)

<sup>94</sup> This is an ancient disused garden of about 1000 m<sup>2</sup>. In order to acquire more visibility, they are trying to involve in the campaign the Association of Mothers and Fathers of schools students (A.M.P.A) to organize pedagogic activities. If the campaign fails, they plan to squat the lot. Other larger garden projects are also foreseen in the peri-urban areas of Arenys de Munt or the Delta de Llobregat (seven hectares). For information see <http://altaveu.barripoblesec.org/el-veinat-recuperar-lantic-hort-de-la-font-trobada/>; <http://font-trobada.blogspot.com/es/>

La Base is characterized by strong (ideological) cohesiveness, notwithstanding the different activism backgrounds including political consumerism, squatting and student movements. This could be explained by the conspicuous definitional effort conducted in the initial phase to identify the principles and objectives of the project, whilst undertaking the building refurbishment work. As Cristina (I50:264) remarked, “we got to know each other deeply while sweating and painting”. The overarching concept of cooperativism is also conducive to appropriation by different ideologies: “*cooperativism was a type of project, a political school that admitted a high degree of heterogeneity, from communist to libertarian anarchists*” (I49). Interestingly, it is believed that the principles constitutional process is a continuous process involving an uneven effort of “appropriation” of those same principles. For example, the permaculture principle was still perceived to be “not yet mature” on the part of some participants, hence it was stressed that it would require additional effort work in order to be assimilated.

A good example of the means-ends consistency of prefiguration was indeed the permaculture principle, itself the result of a long process of discussion. Ecologism and “ecologic” concepts were discarded because some people associated them with “green capitalism”<sup>95</sup> or found them ‘limiting’ because they were only capable of including organic agriculture, while omitting consideration of not only the distance between the points of consumption and production, but also the labor relationships involved in the production process. The permaculture principle was felt to include a range of themes, from the connection with territory and nature, to the need to establish rhythms that allow a symbiotic relationship with nature and a way of life cohabiting the territory. This principle was expressed not only in the use of ‘agroecological’ products but also in the way refurbishment works were carried out in the of summer 2013. Participants of La Seca and La Igualitaria put into question the use of materials such as cement, hence engendering a long debate over whether to prioritize more environmentally friendly materials such as lime mortar, plasterboard and ecological paint, or the economic cost and the rapidity of works and the more productive performance of materials. The group finally decided to be coherent with their perspective and principles and to opt for environmentally sound construction materials and processes.

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<sup>95</sup> As one interviewee told me, “*capital has recuperated much of this discourse about ecologism (...) the capital has reappropriated everything, the multinational corporations (...) have commodified everything and above our social subject, they individualize us and use a discourse as if we were the persons responsible for the end of the planet*” (I54:354).

#### 4.3.4.1. The cooperative neighborhood

La Base was born also as a consequence of disillusion with the effectiveness of so-called 15M “macro-events” such as “Rodea el Congreso” or “Aturem el Parlament” (the symbolic blocking of Parliaments), as *“maybe we are not sufficiently prepared for this and probably what we needed was a base, where, when the event is over, we can go back and continue to work for another one”* (I49:162), hence the idea of organizing in a territorialized way, in the ‘everyday sphere’ at the community and neighborhood level.

The local dimension is where the crux of prefiguration, of living and practicing desired relationships can materialize, as one “brings out the revolution to one’s self”. The organisation of gathering spaces can stir a transformational process by *“developing ourselves”, and “gaining our lives without having to sell them to the market for a paltry price”* (I51:126). Self-employment allows to combine work with life, community and political transformation. La Base conceives of struggle as an “integral thing”<sup>96</sup>, including rootedness in community and material groundedness in the territory through the creation of autonomous structures. In the local dimension, it is possible to demonstrate a way to live without capitalism. Starting from a local project - a “micro-project” - social change can then be upscaled through the networking of localities, and coordination at the neighborhood and city level: *“we are going to demonstrate and construct alternative ways to struggle against this system, and we do this for a social transformation, not for doing micro”* (I48:75).

One of the pillars of La Base is indeed its transformational perspective, anchored in the ‘cooperativism concept’, and aimed at building a network of different solidarity economy projects, and, in a Lefebvrian flavour, to *“attempt to satisfy all the aspects of our lives, to promote a common market”* (I49:388).

Importantly, the cooperativism idea, as already mentioned above, strongly reconnects and

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<sup>96</sup> Two interviewees made reference to the concept of “integral revolution”, theorized by Enric Duran of the Catalan Integral Cooperative, and by the thinker Felix Rodrigo Mora (see for ex Mora, 2012). The Catalan Integral Cooperative (CIC) is a legally registered network with 600 members and 2000 participants in Barcelona. Its structure spans from housing to food, in networks of exchange and cooperatives (Kallis and March, 2015) and defined integral revolution in a way that resembles La Base’s definition of autonomy: as “a process of historic signification for the construction of a new self-managed society, based on autonomy and abolition of existing domination forms: the state, capitalism and all those that affect human relations and relationships with nature. It involves a conscious, personal and collective action, for the improvement and recovery of qualities and values that enable us to live in common. At the same time, it involves the construction of new organizational forms and structures in all the domains of life that guarantee equality of decision and equity in converging the vital life needs” (see <https://integrarevolucio.net/es/revolucion-integral/que-entendemos-por-revolucion-integral/>). Cooperasec indeed set up a debate involving both a representative of CIC and Rodrigo Mora: <https://cooperasec.wordpress.com/construir-allo-comu/>

refers to the workers' mutualism tradition in Catalunya between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1930s, when “*there was no welfare state and workers self-organized through common funds covering pensions, health needs*”: “*now the idea is the same, in a period of privatization of the welfare state*” (I49:31). ‘Resistance common funds’ also made possible to organize strikes for protracted periods to defend workers’ labor rights, as happened with the 44 days of the so-called ‘Canadencia strike’, which led to the 8 hour working day in Spain.<sup>97</sup>

In this vein, La Base denounces the oblivion under which the historical memory of this strong workerist tradition has fallen, and commits to “*re-appropriate it and call ourselves daughters of that history*” (I50:240). The re-appropriation and dissemination of historical memory serves to understand that cooperativism “*was not just a marginal alternative, but had an amazing power in the neighborhoods*” (I49:110): it is indeed possible “*to link a project of self-organization based on the satisfaction of basic needs, with a process of revolutionary attack*” (I49:187). Collective memory of La Base – the set of symbols and practices referring to the past that are shared by a community (Zamponi, 2013) – portrays consumption cooperatives as key relational spaces in the neighborhood associational network, and as institutions capable to partly satisfy workers’ necessities autonomously from the market. That historical period is taken as a learning example of “*how to build a parallel society, not in the sense of something external, but in the sense of something that will generate an alternative*” (I52:228).

The group was deeply influenced by research on (historical) cooperativism conducted by the cooperative La Ciutat Invisible, and its concept of “cooperative neighborhood”, defined as “the territory where its inhabitants self-organize to give solutions to their vital needs (economic, political, health, education, cultural) by cooperating and pooling abilities and capacities, without individual appropriation of common resources nor in the forms of titularity – private property – nor in the forms of use or change – the obtention of plusvalue” (Córdoba-Mendiola & Dalmau, 2014)<sup>98</sup>.

La Base is hence envisioned as a project contributing towards the cooperative neighborhood vision by means of building a self-managed economic infrastructure, and the gradual constitution of a political counterpower through networking with other similar projects, “*generating spaces of solidarity economy and alternatives to employment, with different values*”. The long term objective would entail creating “*an economy whose objective is not*

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<sup>97</sup> The company was actually called “Barcelona Traction, Light and Power Company” and the strike occurred in 1919.

<sup>98</sup> The “Cooperative neighborhood” concept was also the object of a 2009 communication campaign project managed by La Ciutat Invisible and financed by the Federation of Catalunya work cooperatives aimed to give visibility to the existing cooperatives in the neighborhood, through, for example, an interactive map of existing cooperatives (<http://sants.coop/>), strengthening the interconnections, and supporting counseling to existing cooperatives.

*profit but achieving an economic activity for satisfying basic needs of people and with some criteria of environmental sensitiveness and valuing work more than capital” (153:158).*

#### **4.3.5. Can Batlló**

Can Batlló is an inspiring reference point for both Recreant Cruïlles and La Base. Nevertheless, it differs from the previous two cases both in terms of its wider dimension (about 300 participants and tens of projects), and because it is situated in a much older neighborhood struggle of more than 40 years, in which the 15M intervened only as a final boost, given that the seizure of the ex-factory occurred on 11 June 2011, i.e. in the middle of the burst of the 15M.

Can Batlló is a former textile factory dating back to 1878, covering 14 ha, and occupying a third of La Bordeta neighborhood<sup>99</sup>. In its apogee the Can Batlló factory city hosted more than 2000 workers (see Figure 12). After being collectivized during the Spanish Civil War, it was bought in 1943 by the Muñoz Ramonet brothers, but was closed at the beginning of the 1960s, and parcelled into industrial units and warehouses rented to more than 200 enterprises. The claim for the public use of Can Batlló first emerged in 1973, with a campaign by the Sants Social Centre (SSC).<sup>100</sup> Following intense mobilizations, in the 1976 General Metropolitan Plan (GMP) Can Batlló was qualified so as to foresee a green space and some public facilities. In the 1990s the owners of Can Batlló decided to devote the area to housing construction<sup>101</sup>, pending the conversion of the area to residential zoning requalification. After the swap proposal failed in 2001, the Changes to the GMP (the CGMP) were approved in 2006, granting residential status to a part of the area<sup>102</sup> owned by the heirs of Muñoz Ramonet (managed by the Gaudir estate agency), in exchange for the disposal to the municipality of

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<sup>99</sup> La Bordeta is a neighborhood of about 18,000 inhabitants within the third district of Barcelona, Sants-Montjuïc.

<sup>100</sup> Sants Social Centre organized a photo exhibition campaign (“Cop d’ull a Sants”) with the aim of creating awareness of the effects of the urban Comarcal Plan on the surrounding neighborhood. On that occasion, it had already been stated that Can Batlló “*should not fall in the hands of speculation. We have to transform it into a green public and sport space for all the Sants neighbors. We have to impede our neighborhood becoming more dense, and life conditions continuing to deteriorate at the current pace*” (Marce, 2013).

<sup>101</sup> The neighborhood was affected by an important restructuring, giving a new centrality to the axis Gran Via-City of Justice, which entailed a revalorization of the land of the area.

<sup>102</sup> In exchange for permission to build apartments (including two 14 floor skyscrapers), the CGMP foresaw that the estate agency Gaudir would have partly financed the construction of the needed public services in the rest of the lot. The list of public services had first been proposed by the Sants Social Centre and the Saint Medir Church. The Saint Medir Church, located just next to Can Batlló, was an important anti-Franquist “free space”, where several clandestine meetings and activities were organized in Barcelona.



another part of the area which would house public facilities<sup>103</sup>, to be partially funded by Gaudir (an example of the so-called Barcelona model<sup>104</sup>).

Nevertheless, with the looming crisis and the burst of the housing bubble, the plan was again halted. As neighbour Jordi Soler (Soler 2013: 87) stated: “*the economic and housing crisis made us understand that there would have been neither funds nor investments for the speculating ‘pelotazo’<sup>105</sup> that the owners claimed*”. Awareness of this indefinite standstill led to the demand to establish a Follow Up Commission, formed by both neighbors and municipality representatives. In one of these meetings in March 2009, one of the representatives of the Sants Social Centre (SSC) threw down the gauntlet: if the works were not started by June 2011, the neighbors would occupy the site.



**Figure 12.** The Can Batlló ensemble. Source: LaCol.

#### **4.3.5.1. The entrance into Can Batlló**

In a few months, the newly born platform called “Can Batlló is for the neighborhood” was created to make this challenge concrete, and was the result of an intergenerational confluence of different movements: not only older members of the more traditional neighborhood

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<sup>103</sup> The planned public facilities to be built were the following: a primary school, social housing, a library, a youngsters’ centre, and a public sanitary centre. A public park was also foreseen.

<sup>104</sup> The “Barcelona model” usually refers to a typical neoliberal planning model based on the strategic alliance between the state and private sectors to commodify and “brand” the urban environment (Capel 2005; Delgado 2007; Dalmau i Torvà, 2014).

<sup>105</sup> To explain this quite typical Spanish expression I will use the words of an interviewee (I76:30): “[it means] *doing an urban ‘macro-transaction, getting the maximus plus value out of the territory with the least possible effort, no? this is the way things in this country work, that is, the pelotazo culture means doing the minimum and gaining the maximum*”.

movement (the SSC<sup>106</sup>) and La Bordeta neighbors Commission but also some 15M activists, a group of architecture students, soon to become constituted as LaCol cooperative,<sup>107</sup> and several participants of the squatting movement taking part to the Sants neighborhood Assembly<sup>108</sup>. The platform created a public countdown strategy and campaign famously called “Ticktock Can Batlló”<sup>109</sup> (see Figure 13).

The platform nevertheless did not have to occupy the site, as five days before the declared 11 June entrance day<sup>110</sup>, a concession of the use of one industrial unit (proposed by the platform itself) of block 11 was granted, under the legal umbrella of the Neighbors Association, with no time limits specified on the agreement (see the map in Figure 15). The unit, with a ground floor of 750 m<sup>2</sup>, is usually referred to as “Bloc Onze”. Similarly to the Recreant Cruïlles case, the seizure of that space was conceived as a “Trojan horse” to further occupy larger areas within the industrial complex. This ‘appropriation’ success can be explained by the strong media campaign, the recent change in the municipal government<sup>111</sup> and by the very climate of turmoil created by the burst of the 15M movement, “*provoking panic both in the administration and in the owners*” (Soler 2013:90).

On 11 June a ‘ludic demonstration’ of about 1000 people entered the private property (see Figure 14) with a giant fist symbolizing the struggle. The inauguration included cultural

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<sup>106</sup> From the point of view of the Sants Social Centre, the creation of the platform was strategic because it allowed the SSC to keep its hands clean, while eventually undertaking confrontational action (La Peña, 2013). Also, the platform facilitated the diversification of the movement, comprised mainly of retired SSC members and Catalan (ibid).

<sup>107</sup> LaCol is a cooperative of architects made of 14 close friends, sharing space, projects, expenses and resources. They are organized horizontally and a large proportion of their income comes from grants and fellowships (La Peña, 2013), while being committed to a vision of architecture entangled with social change: “We think that the way of transforming the city is through the active participation of people that live in it, and proactive action. We work on interests related to the quality of life of all people that share the city. The contribution of the architect should be done within the urban movement, as one of the pieces of the this machinery, providing criteria for the definition of objectives and strategies, as well as tools for defining ideas through the graphic design. We promote, among other things, debate and discussion on the uses of spaces and the management of urban spaces, the city models, the participation and the recovery of the heritage” (description of La Col from their website: [http://www.lacol.org/?page\\_id=6](http://www.lacol.org/?page_id=6))

<sup>108</sup> The Sants neighborhood Assembly dates back to the late 1990s and was formed by several squatting collectives and social centers. In contrast to the 15M neighborhood assembly, its membership was based at the level of the collective (instead of the individual). In the past, the Sants neighborhood Assembly had been involved with alterglobalization and anti-war in Iraq activism, while in the last few years it mainly focused on the yearly alternative “Festa Major de Sants”.

<sup>109</sup> The campaign was undertaken through a very good mass media campaign, with clocks graffiti, dissemination events etc. See for ex <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/barcelona/los-vecinos-mantienen-plan-okupar-can-batllo-1015290>; [http://elpais.com/diario/2011/02/17/catalunya/1297908443\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/2011/02/17/catalunya/1297908443_850215.html); <http://www.lavanguardia.com/local/barcelona/20110602/54164164188/los-vecinos-que-okuparan-can-batllo-se-reunen-con-ciu-y-confian-en-desencallar-el-proyecto.html>

<sup>110</sup> The Platform was organized in commissions (Press, Negotiation, Action (preparing entrance strategies), Dissemination ) and a wider general assembly. The entrance day set to 11 June, because 1 June was part of a long weekend (which would have helped to build resistance in the face of an eviction).

<sup>111</sup> The change of municipal government was scheduled for the same day. The centre-right party of *Convergència i Unió* governed the municipality for the first time, and hence was somehow inexperienced, and probably would have not liked to inaugurate the first day of government with such a large occupation.

activities and assemblies to decide the use and organization of the space<sup>112</sup> and the functioning of the collective with the creation of the first commissions<sup>113</sup>, and a monthly General Assembly<sup>114</sup>.



**Figure 13.** The Ticktock Can Batlló campaign. Source: <https://canbatllo.wordpress.com/plataforma/>

<sup>112</sup> In the first assembly, it was declared that self-management would have been combined with “*minimal dependence on the administration. (...) We will have to look for self-financing systems (economic model)*” (minutes of the first assembly).

The following day the second GA began to think about further spaces and projects to build within the unit, including a bar space, a space for circus/theatre and dancing, a food cooperative, a climbing wall, a shared nursing space, an urban garden, a space for plastic arts, a space for video/TV production, a kitchen space: soon they would all materialize. A conference-debate promoted by LaCol, called “Let’s think about another Can Batlló” (which was a follow-up of the previous conference “Debating the architectural heritage of Sants”) was designed to put into question the current municipality plan on the industrial complex, hence aiming at “*stopping speculation and starting to build another city*”, by “*rethinking how should the inhabitants, the park, and the facilities be in an industrial complex. Considering to introduce the productive uses and small industry*” (see <http://www.lacol.org/?p=1999>). As it will be explained below, Can Batlló was indeed capable of changing the plan.

<sup>113</sup> These included the spaces that participants wanted to be created first in the unit, such as the library, as well as organizational commissions such as activities, diffusion, negotiation, refurbishment and infrastructures, space design, management model and economics.

<sup>114</sup> The GA agenda is set up by a rotating Coordination Commission. Extraordinary/thematic assemblies would also be established when needed, to discuss more specific political issues (for example, effective ways to change the urban plan, or the meaning of self-management as compared to public, state and communitarian, etc).



Figure 14. The entrance into Can Batlló. Source: <https://canbatllo.wordpress.com/>

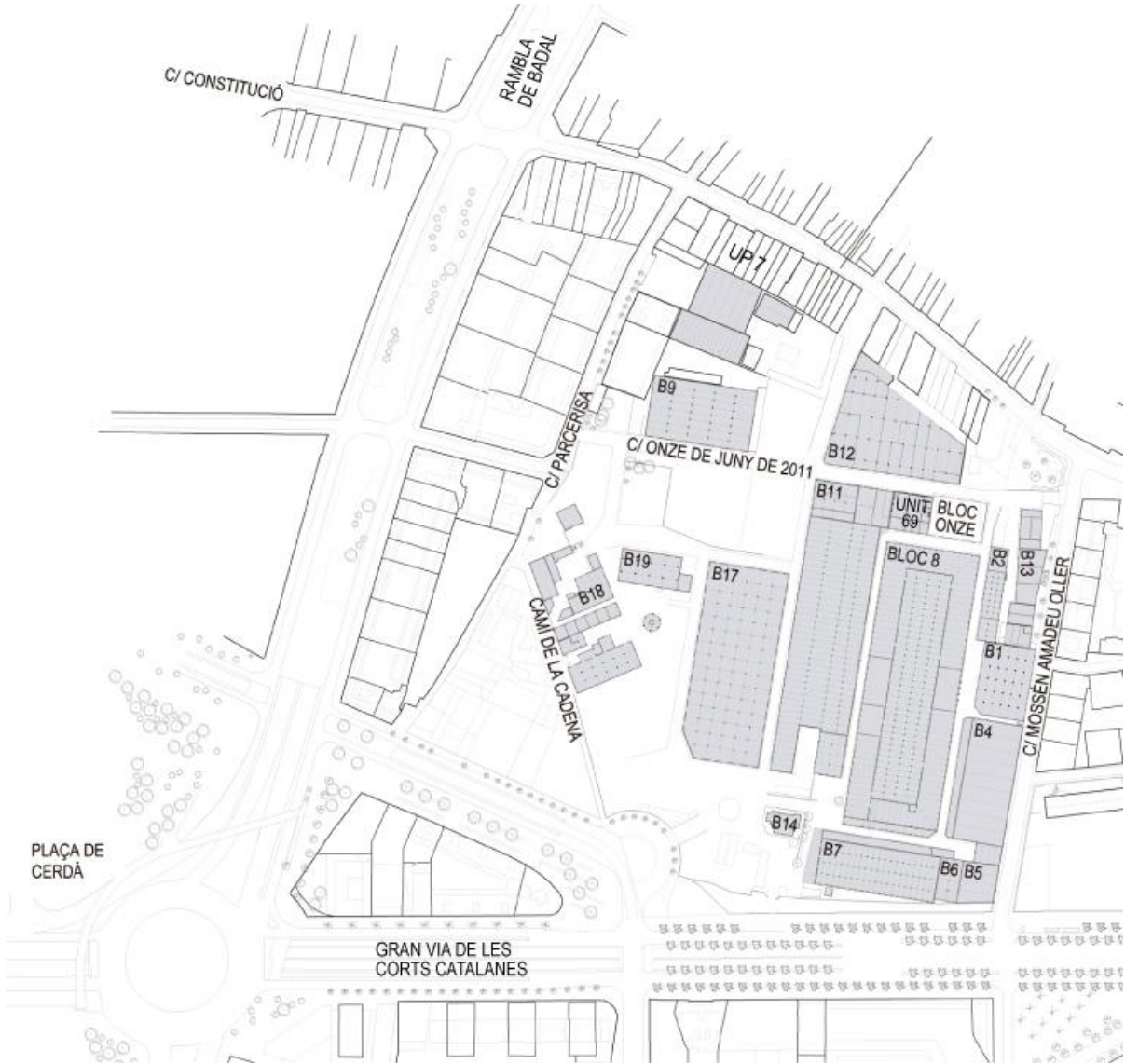


Figure 15. The Can Batlló map. Source: LaCol (2013).

#### 4.3.5.2. Can Batlló articulation and allocation of spaces

The first year of Can Batlló served to define its common rules and core “philosophy”, outlined in the document of “internal regime”. The “Bloc Onze” is defined as “a neighborhood space self-managed through direct democracy by the Platform *“Can Batlló is for the Neighborhood”*”. While *“Bloc Onze should tend towards economic self-sufficiency”*, the costs linked to refurbishment and maintenance of the building, as well as the bills would ideally be covered by the municipality, but Bloc Onze would assume expenses linked to ordinary management. The activities to be prioritized were those ones directed at the neighborhood, offering maximum social benefit, and contributing economically to the wider project of Can Batlló.<sup>115</sup> Remunerative activities would devote part of their revenue to the wider project, hence feeding into the common fund, which would be used, among other things, for non-remunerative projects.

The entire space went through an extensive collective process of refurbishment. The **Space Design Commission** included some people of LaCol as well as other designers and architects, and developed projects for other commissions such as the library, the auditorium, in a participatory way. The **Infrastructure** and the **Carpentry Commissions** were in charge of leading the refurbishment works, building specialized expertise spanning from metallurgy and carpentry to electrical wiring and painting.<sup>116</sup> The **Popular Josep Pons library** (300 m<sup>2</sup>, see Figure 16), was the first public library of La Bordeta neighborhood<sup>117</sup>. Other spaces and related Commissions that were created right after the library were the **Bar**, (Figure 17) where people took turns providing the service, and the **Auditorium Commission**, refurbished and soundproofed through municipality funds and designed by the Space Design commission. Similarly, the municipality took charge of other structural works<sup>118</sup>. Also, Can Batlló participants managed to acquire the services of teams of unemployed specialized workers (each team for a 6 month period) from the Sants neighbourhood, through the Catalan Employment Office and the municipal agency for local development Barcelona Activa<sup>119</sup>.

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<sup>115</sup> Those activities that do not produce a profit and do not have a funding source, but are considered to have a strong social component are also prioritised.

<sup>116</sup> Also, the **Diffusion Commission** takes care of the dissemination of events organized by the **Activities Commission**, and the **Economics Commission** manages the accounting.

<sup>117</sup> With 15,000 documents, the library, completed in less than one year, is the largest library within the Network of self-managed social libraries of which it is part. It also includes the feminist LGBT documentation centre “La Fondona”. The participants taking part to this commission catalogue the documents and make turns to guarantee daily openness.

<sup>118</sup> The municipality repaired leaking roofs, financed the electrical installation, and paid the bills.

<sup>119</sup> Particularly, in 2012 they received a team of 4 people, and 6 people in 2013, which were employed for “the largest works or that necessitate more work or need more knowledge” (164:42). The specialized workers took care for example of setting up



The use of state money and of the salaried workers did create some political discussions over the meaning of self-management and the way of relating to state authorities: “*There are people that consider that this should be 100% self-managed, but in order to do this, you need to create your own resources to do it and generate some alternative economies in it. On the other hand there are other people that say ‘let’s tend to be self-managed but the public is also ours and we have to accept it so that we can advance more rapidly’*” (I76:126). These resources were thought not to infringe on the autonomy of Can Batlló because, as a member of LaCol told me: “*we accept money only in the case that it does not imply some conditions that take away some of our freedom*” (I58:765)<sup>120</sup>.



**Figure 16.** The Josep Pons Library. Source: personal photo.

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the electrical installation or connecting the unit 11 with the unit next to it (unit 69) where the bar warehouse was created. These workers usually decided to join voluntarily after the work had been completed

<sup>120</sup> Another work, the refurbishment of the stairs to the first floor after the first year, was also the result of a competitive application of the Official Association of Architects of Catalunya, which had been prepared collectively under the leadership of LaCol. The project won a refund of 10,000 Euros, but as it had to be first undertaken before getting the refund, participatory vouchers were organized, enabling the collection of the required funds from participants in two weeks.



**Figure 17.** The bar. Source: Can Batlló website

In the autumn of 2012 the platform “Let’s Recuperate Can Batlló” was revived to set up a long process of criteria definition for new projects, in order to make sure that the ‘public’ or ‘common’ character of the space was maintained.<sup>121</sup> The three criteria for validation of projects related to: 1) the social-economic viability of the Can Batlló project - “*tending towards self-management, in the case there is surplus, that it is redistributed to the global project*” (I76:266), 2) the transformational potentiality of both its content and functioning on wider society, and 3) the close relationship with the surroundings and community (see Figure 18). To clarify these criteria, I will take the example of the carpentry project: not only carpenters can conduct works for outer clients allowing them to earn their lives (20% of the earnings go to the common fund), but they provide assistance-DIY-workshops three times a week for neighbours willing to build some furniture or other objects, and carry out communitarian work related to the rehabilitation of Can Batlló.<sup>122</sup>

Can Batlló has hence been steadily growing at two parallel levels, at the level of space – often involving a modification of the CGMP - and the level of projects/content, which are

<sup>121</sup> Assemblies of the ‘Let’s recuperate Can Batlló’, platform ran parallel to the GA for about one year before the two assemblies were joined again in the GA, in spring 2014.

<sup>122</sup> While in contrast to Ateneu La Base, Can Batlló still does not include the possibility of salaried self-employment, it does foresee the possibility of some self-employment conducted through these other means. Some more generalized (salaried) self-employment is also foreseen for future discussion. As some interviewees told me, “*this is a looming debate because there are many people that now are unemployed, so this is a way to create self-employment within Can Batlló, it would be like closing the circle, but well, little by little.*” (I58:545), as these are “*situations that pop up gradually through the everyday life of a project that is growing day by day*” (I77: 224).

intimately entwined. While the first projects of Can Batlló were related to the cultural sphere, a progressive expansion of cooperative urbanism unfolded in the second year towards projects and spaces related to spheres such as economy, education, housing, and green public spaces (see Figure 21). **The Strategy Commission** is in charge of this spatial expansion and of the modification of the urban plan, in accordance with decisions taken in the General Assembly and consultations with neighbours. It also prepares the agenda of the **Negotiation Commission** meetings, whose task is to directly deal with the local authorities.

The **first floor** was refurbished after the first year, and now includes a climbing wall (see Figure 18), a gymnastic, a lounge and a ping pong space (Figure 19), polyvalent rooms for artistic and video creation, for language exchange, tai-chi and for the educational project La Canya.<sup>123</sup> **Unit 69** was until recently the warehouse of the bar, and is planned to be converted into a social canteen. The adjacent units were very soon turned into the **carpentry** and **infrastructure** spaces. In the last unit at the left end of B11 is Can Batlló's graphic art and printing collective "**Unitat 3**", a collective producing home-made ecological **beer project** for the bar to "*overcome the monopoly of multinational corporations of Estrella, Damm and Moritz*"<sup>124</sup>, and a **documentation centre** on social movements of Barcelona, developed by Ciutat Invisible.

In spring 2013, another ticktock campaign called "In Spring We Will Plant Ourselves" was initiated to 'open' Can Batlló to the neighbourhood, by destroying a part of the walls of Can Batlló enclosure, "*otherwise it would have been like a ghetto*" (I77:610).<sup>125</sup> A new pedestrian street was created in front of Block 11<sup>126</sup>, and called after the entrance day (see Figure 20). The first public and communitarian **urban garden** was also created<sup>127</sup>, mainly responding to

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<sup>123</sup> La Canya is aimed at providing professional accreditation and expertise for young and unemployed people, in tandem with other projects and commission of Can Batlló, from carpentry to gardening to vehicles repair. Nevertheless, it has not been implemented yet.

<sup>124</sup> Minutes of the 17<sup>th</sup> assembly of the 'Platform Can Batlló is for the neighborhood' (20 January 2014). The beer project also provides assistance on beer production.

<sup>125</sup> The demolished walls lie at the crossing between street Constitució and Street Mossèn Amadeu Oller, and in Street Parcerisa. Several participants and neighbors started to demolish the wall, and a month after an enterprise was called by the municipality to do the demanded works. The building located right at the corner was also torn down, where the new garden was created.

<sup>126</sup> The street connects Street Parcerisa with Street Mossèn Amadeu Oller. The new entrances and the new street involved important changes with regards to the relationship with the neighborhood: "*since this call was opened, you can see a lot of people passing by, stopping in front of here, reading the posters, entering and asking 'ehi, well, I will come'. It is an incredible change with regards to relationships in the neighborhood*" (165:512).

<sup>127</sup> With the support of those same vehicles that demolished the building, the soil of the lot was taken out as it was contaminated. The emptied pool was covered up with a plastic sheet and filled in with imported good earth. A small lot of 50 m<sup>2</sup>, it was inaugurated on the second anniversary of Can Batlló, but in November 2015 was substituted with another larger garden (275 m<sup>2</sup>) at the corner between street 11 June 2011 and Parcerisa Street, after I finished my fieldwork. The new larger garden had been planned since the beginning, mainly to help immigrants of the Solidaridad Association: "*we are going to*



the needs of two groups of people: immigrants of the Solidarity Association of the Saint Medir Church, and a group of disabled people, brought once a week by a social worker<sup>128</sup>. Hence the garden is perceived both as a project for “ruralizing the city” (I66) as well as “*a therapeutic centre, a relational centre, a communication centre, a creativity centre*” (I59:168).



**Figure 18.** The climbing wall (personal photo).



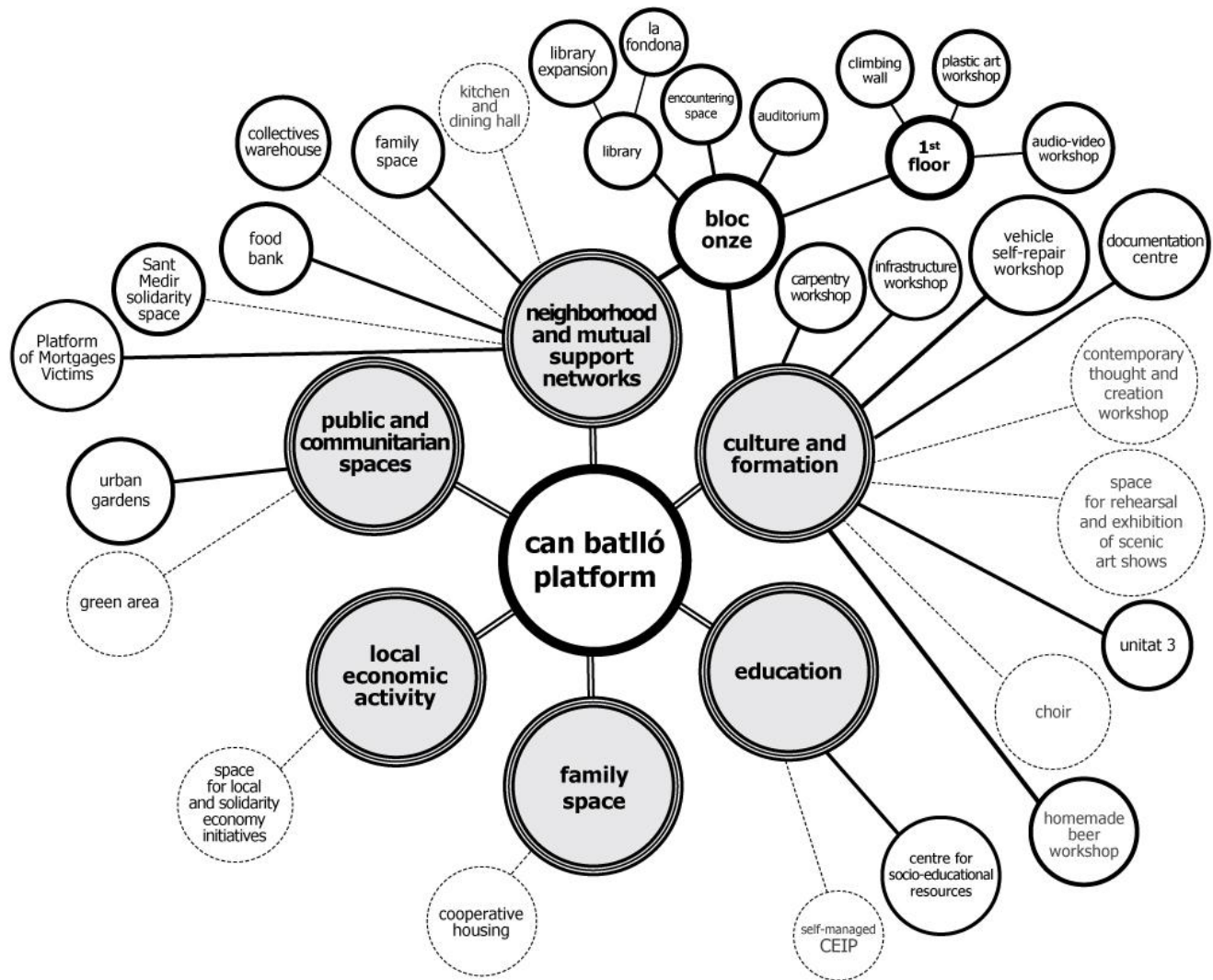
**Figure 19.** The ping-pong space (personal photo).



**Figure 20.** The 11 June 2011 Street. Source: Can Batlló website.

*build it altogether so that they can later manage it as they wish, well we are going to give them support for creating it?* (I59:37). The urban garden was one of the first projects that were decided to be implemented in Can Batlló.

<sup>128</sup> In the General Assembly it was decided to equip industrial unit 11 with an elevator to make the first floor accessible to disabled people. The disabled group could choose the type of project and elevator to build.



**Figure 21.** Map of Can Batlló’s projects. Bubbles with lighter circumferences are projects not yet implemented. Source: Translation of LaCol’s map

The Garden Commission also aimed at reconceptualizing the way the **park** - “*the number 1 claim of the neighbors*” (I58:341) - had been planned in the 2006 CGMP, by putting into question the design of a lawn park conceived only as functional to the future luxury apartments towers of the Gaudir agency.<sup>129</sup>

**Block 12** was subsequently seized and used temporarily for theatre rehearsals, vehicles (self) repair<sup>130</sup>, a warehouse for the urban garden and a family/shared nursery space. For **block 9** a theatre collective was planned, as well as the relocation of projects first located in block 12 (which is planned to be demolished<sup>131</sup>), and in block 5 there is a food bank of the Federation of neighborhood associations.<sup>132</sup>

The **housing cooperative La Borda**<sup>133</sup> is a housing cooperative under a cession of use scheme<sup>134</sup> that will be located in UP7<sup>135</sup>, qualified by the 2006 CGMP as ‘official protection housing’. The group comprises about 30 assembly-organized family units, and the architectural design is participatory, building upon expertise from LaCol. The apartments will adopt a co-housing model<sup>136</sup>, with plans for energetic self-sufficiency: indeed as claimed by a

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<sup>129</sup> To this purpose, the garden commission classified the trees arguing they were ancient and should not be cut.

<sup>130</sup> The project is focused on advice/formation on self-repair.

<sup>131</sup> According to the 2006 urban plan, block 12 was supposed to be demolished in order to create space for the park, but very recently plans by LaCol to keep a part of its outside walls for their historical heritage value are being considered (growing plants or having a glasshouse inside), which would also allow to keep the pedestrian Street 11 June 2011. Another building object of an anti-demolishment campaign for its historical heritage is a nineteenth century country house, the only surviving one in the neighborhood.

<sup>132</sup> Foodstuff donated by the European Union and the Red Cross is stocked every three months, before being redistributed among the different neighborhoods.

<sup>133</sup> The idea of creating a housing cooperative first emerged on the occasion of the three days event “Fem Coop” in May 2012, organized by La Ciutat Invisible, within the project “cooperative neighborhood” (see footnote 98). The event, taking place in Can Batlló, was aimed at “*promoting the cooperative receipt as a strategy for strengthening a local economy rooted in the territory*” (<http://sants.coop/cooperativisme/femcoop2012-fem-economia-cooperativa/>). La Borda aimed to start the construction works in the summer 2015. As recalled by Marta (I58:14), “*its [La Ciutat Invisible’s] political discourse and all its research influenced, propelled the project*”. Indeed, after the event a group of 15 people started to think about the possibility of setting up a housing cooperative project, and got in touch with the Barcelona-based association Sostre Civic, working on housing cooperatives schemes under a cession of use.

<sup>134</sup> Cooperatives with cessions of use are centered on the right of use of the cooperative acquired through an initial payment which can be returned when leaving the cooperative, and maintained through the payment of an affordable monthly fee devoted to covering the costs of land purchase and the debt assumed for construction or refurbishment. This model probably has its most important application in the Danish Andel model and in the Uruguayan experience of Uruguayan Federation of Housing Cooperatives for Mutual Support (FUCVAM). The largest of its kind in Catalonia, cooperative housing under a cession of use scheme is a non speculative model of housing according to use value. In contrast to other types of social housing, the lack of ownership status prevents the eventual selling of houses after a few years at a higher price - hence losing its “social” dimension. Each family unit should contribute with an initial payment of 15,000 Euros, and an average monthly fee of about 450 Euros, varying according to the size of the apartment. The rest of the funding for building the apartments would come from the ethical finance cooperative Coop57 (both in the form of participatory bonds and credit), and from external entities and association like Sostre Civic, Cooperativa Obrera del Prat, and Denmark Cooperatives (the so-called “partners-collaborators”) that could contribute to the project.

<sup>135</sup> The group first opted for implementing the project in an already existing building, B2, so as to lessen any ecological impacts. Nevertheless after the first meeting with the municipality the group was warned that this would have been time consuming for the required changes to the CGMP. Following suggestions from the municipality, they decided to locate their future project in UP7, already qualified by the 2006 CGMP as “official protection housing”. Works will be contracted to a construction cooperative, while self-construction, where possible, would also be relied upon (those participants contributing with self-construction will be granted a discount on the initial payment).

<sup>136</sup> The co-housing model is based on the idea of common living and optimal use of resources by sharing services and big common spaces, hence will foresee small apartments for each family unit and big common spaces: “*the idea is that each apartment would have just a minimal service, but that all that could be collectivized outside, be it*” (I58: 62). So the laundry,

participant of one of La Borda's assemblies, "it is not so much about social housing but about an alternative way of life".

With an area of 6,000 m<sup>2</sup>, the social economy **breeding ground Coópolis** (probably to locate in B4<sup>137</sup>) will offer space (with affordable rent) and counseling to emerging social economy small enterprises and cooperatives for 3 years, and to autonomous workers<sup>138</sup>.

The project of **libertarian primary school-kindergarten Arcadia** envisions the creation a self-managed, public school (CEIP), but this is still at ideational stage given that it requires some changes in the legal system.<sup>139</sup> Finally, another project planned to be implemented soon is the installation of **solar panels**, in collaboration with Som Energia, a recent cooperative focused on production and distribution of renewable energy<sup>140</sup>. The internal regime elaborated in 2012 specified that "*the project should tend towards energetic efficiency and of its consumption, reducing as much as possible the environmental impact*" (Can Batlló, 2012:12).

#### 4.3.5.3. Public from the common

The core objective of the Can Batlló project is "*to achieve spaces for the neighborhood* (I55:46, focus group). Indeed, the La Bordeta neighborhood lacks many public facilities.

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a large kitchen and living room, library/working space, bike and stroller storage spaces, a coworking space, gardens, and a children's playroom would all be part of the common areas.

<sup>137</sup> Coópolis is waiting for the land property passage from the Catalan government to the municipality.

<sup>138</sup> The ideational project was developed by LaCol, La Ciutat Invisible and the consultancy company Amas4, specialized in advising emerging cooperatives and enterprises, through a fund of 18,000 Euros granted by the municipality. Advice will also be offered to outside individuals planning to create an enterprise, and to unemployed people looking for a job. Initial funding for the implementation of the project should come both from the municipality and ethical cooperative finance.

<sup>139</sup> The group spent a formative period at another self-managed school in Extremadura called Paideia, which nevertheless requires teenagers to take the final exam of Compulsory Secondary School at normal schools, hence not granting the public recognition of the title. The cooperative school is instead conceived to provide a public service with support and full recognition from the State. As explained to me by one activist, self-managed schools existed during the Franquist era along with many private/religious schools, and a few national/public (Franquist) schools, and spurred the movement for public schools after the end of Franquism, after which cooperative schools almost ceased to exist. The idea of a cooperative model re-emerges now with the crisis: "*what we are considering, from Can Batlló, is that clearly when schools were cooperative, they were already doing a public service, when they were converted into State ones [in the 1990s], for example now that they are cutting education, schools lose autonomy, and lose resources, so they lose much of the public quality they had. So, we say "well, maybe if the cooperative model was kept but with the support from the state, maybe now there would not be any cuts"* (I76:530).

<sup>140</sup> Studies together with engineering cooperative network UNICO-Arquenova specialized on renewable energies were undertaken regarding the maximum power that could be installed on the roof of Bloc Onze, the monitoring of electricity consumption during the day and a proposal for photovoltaic energy self-sufficiency. Further developments depend on the type of funding that will be obtained for the installation. In case the municipality does not accept to pay for the project, three options would be considered: a crowdfunding campaign, an ethical finance investment (funded by Som Energia and Coop57) or, in the most ambitious case, the investment by Som Energia to create a photovoltaic installation able to sell energy to the network. In the first two cases, a civil disobedience campaign (part of the broader Spanish disobedience campaign "solar guerrilla") against the recent change in legislation that penalizes the small scale private photovoltaic production is being contemplated: "*Som Energia will bill what we consume according to the energy meter, but Som Energia for sure will not notify to the Industry Department that we have a photovoltaic installation. It will be known because if we decide that it is a campaign, we will advertise it*" (I60:138).

Hence Can Batlló plans to advance on two parallel routes: on the one hand, it demands that those public facilities committed by the municipality since the 1976 GMP, be built. This was only partially achieved through the construction of the first healthcare centre of Bordeta-Magòria. On the other hand, the Can Batlló collective is providing some of the facilities planned by the CGMP - the cultural and young people centre, the housing cooperative, and the park - together with new projects. These facilities are public property, but are being self-managed, with structural works paid for by the municipality. While some of the self-managed blocks have been ceded for an indefinite time period (Block 11) or for very long periods (e.g., 75 years for La Borda), other projects have been built while knowing that they may have a more temporary use.<sup>141</sup> Participants are convinced that it would be difficult to terminate even those projects located in facilities that have not been formally ceded (on a long term basis), given the popular support that Can Batlló has been able to raise. The urban changes made to the complex have not involved construction of new buildings, and they have been made by taking into consideration neighbors' needs, through neighborhood assemblies organized by the Strategy Commission. While interests of both parts do not always exactly coincide, compromises are always sought.

There is some shared awareness that what is being developed is a new meaning of “public”: public as something truly belonging to everyone, “managed by the common”, and not by the state, as a communitarian public good. This sense of public is counterpoised to what is normally intended with the word “public”, conflated to “state”, where citizens are passive users. Participants are wary of the risks involved in ceding the management of appropriated spaces to the municipality, Can Batlló is often contrasted to municipal civic centres - “*where the organizational structure is hierarchical and you always obey to the interests of the party that is governing*” (I65:244)<sup>142</sup> - which had been seized by the neighborhood movement in the 1970s and then ceded to the administration through private enterprises and “externalizations” (OMB 2014).

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<sup>141</sup> This is the case for example of the projects built in B9, where, according to the CGMP the public primary school Perú should be located. In case plans for building the school do materialize, participants avow that they would be ready to be relocated, but are unconvinced that they will have to incur such a possibility. Other blocks that were meant to be turned into public facilities will be probably appropriated by the Can Batlló collective because there is no longer a need for those public facilities: this is the case for example of B4 (future seat of Coópoli) where the Catalan Department of Environment, restructured in 2010, was supposed to go.

<sup>142</sup> One case that is normally used for comparison is the neighborhood civic centre Cotxeres de Sants: “*if you go to Cotxeres de Sants, which is a civic centre, clearly in theory it is for everyone. But if you want to go, you need to make an appointment, you need to be on a waiting list, you have to go through much bureaucracy and can only go at certain times, and you don't have any power to decide what is being done. The municipality technicians are those who decide what to do and not to do*” (I64:536).

This new sense of “public from the common” is related to self-management and “the will to generate autonomy” (I58:721), particularly towards the municipality (as opposed to cooptation). The autonomy concept is also referred to the relative autonomy of commissions and projects, necessary for avoiding that “*everything comes to a standstill because if everyone has to decide everything jointly, we don’t advance*” (I55:161). Autonomy of commissions and projects requires “physical autonomy, having a space” (I62:14). Finally, autonomy is also meant as non dependency towards “*the system, its economic cycle, its cultural cycle, its invasive determination of how we should live, how we should organize ourselves*” (I60:512).

Following Lefebvre, counter-spaces involve the vanquishing of fragmentation typical of abstract space: integrity of function is restored through self-management. Many participants remarked that what they are pursuing is “cooperative urbanism”: building another model of a city in a truly participatory way, linked to “*dissolving the paralyzing dychotomies between technicians and users: 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). Cooperative urbanism envisions a different model of cohabitation and living, based on cooperative ownership, and on non discrimination of spaces: “*[in the conventional city] people go sleeping in a site, consume in another, work in another site and get educated in another. What we raise here is a new model of living the city in which cohabitation and transversality are recuperated and all is construed in a non authoritarian, assembly-based way*” (I60:492).

Cooperative urbanism is also related to the concept of cooperative neighborhood (as in La Base), which foresees solidarity and social economy initiatives – especially targeted by Coópolis - as capable to engender new economic relations “*distinct from those derived or promoted by the market economy*” (I56:160). Another type of economy would hence develop, hinged on “*the creation of economic cycles relatively autonomous from capital*” (I76:1044) and truly attached to territories.

#### **4.4. Untangling indignant prefigurative territories**

The cases analysed in this chapter are illustrative of how prefigurative politics is deeply interwoven with reappropriation and production of new space: the symbiotic relationship between prefigurative politics and politics of space, what I have called “prefigurative



territories”. This paper argues that prefigurative politics evolved within the 15M movement in Barcelona, in a progressive shift of emphasis from the first two components of prefigurative politics, the synecdochic-proleptic and the means-ends consistency, in the *acampada*, to a third dimension, the creation of alternatives, in the “spin-off” projects. Thus, contrary to some of the critiques of prefigurative politics (e.g. Taylor 2013; Smucker, 2013; Gitlin 2013a, 2013b; Giri, 2013), these cases show that prefigurative politics do not necessarily stay congealed within a social movement into process fetishization or “lifestylism”- critiques made especially of the Square’s prefigurative politics. Neither do prefigurative politics eschew questions of visions, goals and strategy. On the one hand, this characterization of prefigurative politics depends on an absence of tension between strategic dimension and the focus of prefiguration on means-ends consistency and consensus processes. Not only horizontal decision-making can be effective (organized in autonomous commissions endowed at times with delegative power and a general assembly, whose order of the day is at times set by a rotating coordination committee) and can collectively determine the goals, but, further, indignant prefigurative politics has always a transformational vision and is hence strategic.

On the other hand, a possible explanation for the ‘successful’ evolution of prefigurative politics and territories towards the building of alternatives can be linked not only to the widespread character of 15M, which Fernández-Savater (2012) depicts as a ‘social climate’<sup>143</sup>, but to the strength of previous social movements and the collective memory retained within new movements. To put this in an interviewee’s words, “the 15M movement was not the big-bang” (I68:1). If the alterglobalization, the autonomous, the *okupa* and the free culture movements are brother movements of the 15M (Martínez and García, 2012; Flesher Fominaya, 2014; Morell, 2012), the mother movement of 15M is the neighborhood movement (Castells, 1983; Borja, 1975), which explains why a ‘natural evolution’ of the 15M movement was decentralization to the neighbourhoods. Further, as it is evident from the concept of cooperativism and especially from La Base’s case, an important ancestor is the workers’ movement in Barcelona from the beginning of twentieth century.

Plaza Catalunya was “a micro-cosmos of alternatives”, a “psychomagic” space riddled with imagination and creativity” (to put it in an interviewees’ own words). Its politics of space that I have illustrated through the mapping of the square is synecdochic of the diverse alternative radical imaginaries it contained and gave life to. The children’s playground, the harmony

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<sup>143</sup> Fernández-Savater (2012) depicts the 15M as a social climate, which he defines as “not only a movement or an organized structure composed of assemblies and commissions, but also a mental state a different collective disposition towards reality, marked by the empowering experience of the squares and spread into the entire society”.

space with massages and laughing therapy, the urban garden, the library, the cinema discussion space, the art gallery, the study room, the theatre tent, the bio-construction house in a tree, the poetry reading, the ecological electricity through dynamos and solar panels, and the recycling practices were all signifiers of an alternative society where emotional arousal, solidarity, cooperation and sharing bonds, equality ideals, autonomy and self-management presumptions, ecological visions, artistic and cultural sensibilities, caring and creative expressions were molded. The Square was - to put it again in an interviewee's words - "a panacea": a commons satisfying the needs of its daily reproduction, from psychophysical wellbeing to food, hence "coming full circle in the Square" through the urban garden, by "eating what we cultivate", and demonstrating that "local, seasonal, ecological agriculture and managed by the producers" is indeed possible. The square was hence unfolding the "contraction" envisaged by Badiou (2011), where "the situation contracts in a sort of representation of itself, a metonymy of the overall situation" (Badiou, 2011: 68).

The square was a differential space where knowledge, social and individual needs were integrated. In the inextricable link between new social relations and new space, horizontality, collectivism, and mass public deliberations proceeded in parallel with the transformation of space that reflected these principles. The commissions in charge of the acampada social reproduction, from environmental care and food, to educational and health needs and economics management, were indeed paralleled by commissions devoted to speculating about the traits of the desired society on those same issues (i.e. the education, health, economy, food and environment sub-commissions within the Content Commission, and all the other sub-commission from outraged feminists to immigrants, housing etc.). As commented by Lefebvre (1991:53), "Any 'social existence' aspiring or claiming to be 'real', but failing to produce its own space, would be a strange entity, a very peculiar kind of abstraction unable to escape from the ideological or even the 'cultural' realm". Plaza Catalunya was indeed both a place for abstract discussions and a space implementing those very imaginaries by the production of new spaces.

Hence the depiction of the prefigurative politics of camps as expressive, personalistic, and process fetishizing (Gitlin, 2013; Smucker, 2013; Taylor, 2013) finds its limit. This is at least the case of the indignados movement, in a deeper analysis of the practices pursued and the organization of the square, where content and demands were elaborated contemporaneously to social reproduction. Further, the decentralized evolution of the movement to the



neighborhoods, although not exempt of critical points, should prevent any accusation of space fetishization (Marcuse, 2011; Miller & Nicholls, 2013). The movement's emphasis on the territorialized creation of alternatives after the *acampada* brought the emergence of initiatives and projects linked to neighborhood assemblies, some of which I have analysed. The sprouting of new urban gardens, the creation of hybrid projects such as *Recreant Cruïlles*, *Ateneu La Base* and *Can Batlló* all speak to the importance of the appropriation and making of public space as a repertoire of action (rather than contention, as in Martínez and García, 2012) and of the use of space for building alternatives. Prefigurative politics produces political territories that are processual and in tension between the present and future, living and developing the radical imaginaries rooted in the process of becoming (Goyens, 2009; Ince, 2012). Through a mitosis of spaces and relations, new projects arose in which the third dimension of prefigurative politics, the creation of alternatives, developed, while the other two retained their importance.

The cases analysed hence should not be depicted as terrains of resistance (Paul Routledge, 1996): territory is not ground nor terrain, but it is made collectively through struggles, negotiations (Sassen, 2012) and through the content of projects and relationships engendered. Also, an understanding of these projects as simply terrains of resistance (Routledge, 1996) or spaces of resistance (Pile and Keith, 1997) as if resistance were their ultimate horizon does not grasp their “transgressing of the boundaries of the possible, acceptable, and representable” (Swyngedouw, 2011). This is a movement made of both resistance (for example, claiming for those public services that are being retreated by austerity policies) and concomitant creation of alternatives through a proactive, offensive (instead of defensive) attitude of actualizing and making real the claims and demands that activists are advancing. It embodies Harvey's (2012) double-pronged political attack, made of both forcing the state to supply more in the way of public goods, along with the self-organization to appropriate and supplement those goods and enhance the qualities of reproductive and environmental commons.

This building of alternatives is carried out through experimentation, demonstration and a vision of proliferation. As one interviewee of *Recreant Cruïlles* mentioned when referring to the activities and celebrations that involve the closing of the adjacent streets to the traffic: “(our objective is) *is to demonstrate not so much discursively, but in the daily practice by occupying space...that it is indeed possible and furthermore experiment what this would imply if it was really pedestrianized*” (169:34). The practices hence serve also to demonstrate

that those alternatives are “*nothing utopic*” (I50: 246, La Base), as “*these are spaces where it is demonstrated that another reality is possible and where doors are opened for you, that is all possibilities are open*” (I59:223, Can Batlló). In La Base the dissemination of workers’ cooperativism memories in the early twenty first century, was also meant to show that an alternative future was possible, as the past coopearativism was not a “marginal alternative”. Proliferation is related to demonstration concerns: “*attempting to do, disseminating to people that it is possible to do things in another way*” (I64:536, Can Batlló) is usually done in a way as to make things intelligible and completely documented and freely accessible to anyone to replicate:

*“it is not necessary to wait for the revolutionary change, because it will never come about, instead the change comes from changing small parts of the system that are replicable, this is also an obsession we have. Everything we do, we reflect – sometimes not all of us – and think about it deeply so that everything we do is sufficiently explained and documented in order for people in other spaces can replicated the basic lines of what we are doing”* (I60:493).

Experimentation can be thought of as what bridges the second to the third dimension of prefigurative politics: through the enactment and foretaste of some feature of the alternative future society and imaginaries it is possible to experiment and jointly determine the desired alternative to the current state of affairs and how to achieve it : Can Batlló for example is “*a social school, a school for social relations, a school for understanding how we can organize ourselves and to understand and decide how we want our neighborhood to be*” (I65:512). Participants in Can Batlló also experiment with new forms of management of the public, what has been termed “public from the common” as well as with “cooperative urbanism”, entailing the attempt to dissolve the dichotomy between technician and user. Through experimentation, they can gradually envisage self-employment even for non-productive activities to ensure that certain social projects are not left aside.

Similarly, Recreant Cruïlles is envisioned as a laboratory for a reform of the actual social and urban city model. Experimentation is also carried through a continuous, conspicuous work of self-definition – through setting of principles, lengthy internal regime documents etc. – that point towards the dissolution of another dichotomy, that one between theory and practice. At the same time, this dissolution in no way detracts from the important role of “expert” actors such as LaCol and La Ciutat Invisible, but instead points towards their embeddedness in the wider movement. Indeed, while architects of LaCol were an important resource for urban planning changes negotiated with the district, the latter played a significant function in

framing the common understanding of concepts such as ‘cooperative neighborhood’.

Experimentation is associated with the crux of living and practicing relationships, embodying the desired society. As one participant of La Base told me:

*“we will not be able to change things if we do not organize ourselves in a way that is an image of what we want to do and that strengthen us. We should be consistent in order to challenge the existing order. If we don’t start to do it, we won’t be able to change the existing order, and we would only be able to reproduce it, and the only way to construct something new is starting to do it”* (I48:72).

Along this line, experimentation involves practices of resubjectivation through alternative economic institutions, grounded on the territory as a site of becoming (Gibson-Graham, 2006): ‘bringing the revolution to oneself’ through personal transformation and building of community. As Cristina avowed *“What we are doing is revolutionary, that is attempting that our society change some values that seem to us more fair, and live in this way”* (I50:305). In La Base, the ecological construction works, the service and consumption of agro-ecological products in the kitchen, as well as self-employment are prime examples of this experimental “living according to alternative values”: self-management points the way to the transformation of everyday life (Lefebvre, 1976:124). In Can Batlló collective work is an important tool for building non-capitalist forms of social relationships, as it is “a social work, for the good of the community” (I65:454), which, together with co-habitacion foreseen by La Borda, would allow people to live, work and consume in the same place, hence enabling even more to conduct life according to one’s values. In a Lefebvrian perspective, counter-space, as a form of more enduring, self-managed differential space, “will restore unity to what abstract space breaks up – to the functions, elements and moments of social practice (...) to the corpus of human needs” (1991: 52). The generation of the common fund to finance non-productive activities in both Can Batlló and La Base embodies the solidarity and cooperation values of which the whole project is imbued. Of course these reflections are reminiscent of the fact that such cases can also be understood through the lens of commons, something which will be explored in the next section.

These cases display important differences between them. For example, they are quite diverse in terms of repertoires of collective action, from squatting (urban gardens), renting of space

(La Base), to cession of use under municipal permission (Can Batlló, Recreant Cruïlles) <sup>144</sup>. Of course the “building of alternatives” dimension is weaker in the urban gardens, and stronger in the other cases. They also vary in terms of “radicality” or extent of political content and objectives. Nevertheless, substantial commonalities can be extrapolated from these cases. To start with, while political claims are much stronger in the latter three cases, these were also sought in the urban gardens, for example through the release of the “Handbook of the Good Orcharder” aimed at establishing rules of conduct for ensuring the continual “politicization” of the garden.

Further, while almost all the cases (except for Can Batlló) originated from the 15M movement, they all represent a confluence of diverse movements, from the squatting and autonomous movements to the student, environmental/political consumerism and neighborhood association movements. The Square was in some cases conducive to such a confluence, as the occupation served as an important catalyst to coalesce participants that did not have an activist past with different groups of activists and previous movements, developing their connections further. While this confluence contributed to an incisiveness and internal richness, it also gave rise to some underlying tensions. For the Poblenou indignant urban gardens, the confluence with non (indignados) activists of the neighborhood risked bringing about a depoliticization of ambitions. The political dimension, including both the denunciation of housing speculation and the understanding of the garden as a space for communal enjoyment and participation, in opposition to its understanding as a productive place for individual consumption, was a continuous underlying struggle from within. In Recreant Cruïlles, the underlying tensions principally ran between the traditional neighborhood movement – mostly supporting the project from the outside and perceiving the project just as a transitory one for the building of public facilities - and the 15M members and new participants that joined the group after its “autonomization” from the assembly, whose objective was instead to self-manage the Germanetes space on a more permanent basis. In La Base these tensions were less evident because the “core group” underwent a deep self-definitional process, involving objectives and principles of the project: collaborative work can be a powerful source for collective identity, as Cristina (I58:264) told me, “we got to know each other deeply while sweating and painting”. The differences in terms of environmental

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<sup>144</sup> Nevertheless, similarly to autonomous geographies (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010), the cases analysed prefer to settle on non squatted land to espouse a long term vision of permanency instead of vulnerability: hence La Base preferred to stabilised itself in a rented building. This is not the case of the indignant urban gardens, where the construction of alternatives-component is much less important.

awareness (for ex. between activists coming from political consumerism and those coming from the squatter and student movement) that unfolded during the construction works were solved positively and taken as an example of a strong learning experience, it was stressed that the permaculture principle was not shared in the same degree by all the members but that it required a continuous ‘appropriation effort’. Finally, in Can Batlló, differences grossly related to the type of movement emerged for example with regards to the type of relationship to hold with the municipality (on whether to accept funding of infrastructure works, in particular autonomists and anarchists were more reticent than neighborhood associations activists), but in general the large diversity of positions were combined through the formula of being self-managed for ordinary management and accepting refunds from the municipality for structural works – as public money is also ours” - at least until “you create your own resources (...) and generate some alternative economies” (I76:126). While it was acknowledged that diversity does imply a price – for e.g. a higher effort for reaching a consensus in assemblies – it was highly valued as a key objective that would have ensured that Can Batlló did not turn into a “ghetto”: the open character of prefiguration involves a wider contestation of the hegemonic order, these cases actively get involved with their surroundings and neighborhood in a continuous ‘opening up’ process, they are not “insular enclaves”. The open prefiguration feature is also connected to a conception of place that is both territorial and relational, both concerned with locality and network building.

Open prefiguration is hence one of the elements that differentiate prefigurative territories, for example, from scenes (Leach and Haunss, 2008) or from more standard social centres, that can be thought of, following Hirschman’s (1979) typology, as “exit strategies” (Mudu, 2012:418) or “infrastructure for escaping” (Sguiglia, 2011), broadly defined as counter-cultural (Llobet Estany, 2004).

This is even evident, although to a lesser extent, in the Xino gardens’ somehow troubled, but in the end successful effort, to open its open doors to the wider neighborhood, and in the Poblenou indignant gardens’ initial constitutional act (as the 15M assembly squatted new lots to allow other neighbors to have their piece of land). In Recreant Cruïlles the very definition of the activities submitted to the Empty Spaces Programme was a participatory process involving the neighbours and environmental actors in the city, and the project continued to be open and accessible for everyone to take part – the cartoon painted on the entrance door said “this space is yours”. At the same time, from the beginning, Recreant Cruïlles aimed to have an impact on the neighborhood’s urbanism through the pedestrianization of one of its adjacent

streets, the setting up of the first neighborhood square, and the appropriation of new buildings for public facilities. Importantly Recreant Cruilles became directly involved into the Urbanism Committee of the Neighbors' Association so as to enhance its potential influence over the district urban planning. As for Can Batlló, its space was similarly conceived for the neighbors' uses from the start, and meetings and assemblies with neighbors were periodically set up to collect their needs. As an interviewee powerfully explained:

*“we are autonomous but we are not isolated. The system wants troublemakers and activists from the cities to go live in the mountains, stay there in a tent and cultivate their organic agriculture. This is an option, but .. to me personally it seems that it changes nothing, because these are spaces that the system allows to exist. We are instead in the heart of the system, in the city of Barcelona, a city of shop windows, we question it and convert it into small spaces and in vital areas, collaborating with people from La Base, Flor de Maig, Germanetes etc... we are showing to people in our surroundings that we are not an isolated egg, we are not autonomous in the sense of being closed, instead we are permeable and replicable” (I60:496).*

While the case of La Base is somehow different because of its rented building, it also holds an open membership policy and the building is conceived as a space for the wider neighborhood, that can be used even by collectives and cooperatives that do not take part in the project. Its involvement in the neighborhood is nevertheless even more evident through its leading role in the “Let's Stop the Parallel Plan” platform.

In the next section I will turn to the radical imaginaries that the territories are prefiguring.

#### **4.4.1. Radical imaginaries**

These cases testify to the will to make public space truly public in the face of growing privatization and commodification of urban space, and diminishing publicness for the interests of real estate capital. Hou (2012) calls the occupied spaces and urban gardens “insurgent public spaces”, which differ from institutional public space in that they are brought into being by those who appropriate them and in which citizens and communities can decide over the uses of the space. Still, this concept somehow does not fully grasp the potentiality of projects such as Recreant Cruilles and Can Batlló. Indeed, these cases can also be understood as prefiguring and building the commons. Commons have been defined as “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), or as “a property, a practice, or a knowledge that is shared by a community” (Gibson-Graham et al, 2013). They are produced through commoning, i.e. through forms of cooperation and mutual bonds that serve to “discover, innovate and negotiate new ways of doing things for themselves” (Bollier and Helfrichs, 2012). The practice of commoning is motivated by an ethic of care for what nourishes both people and the planet (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). Commons display an integration of production, reproduction, consumption and governance, which are usually assigned to separate realms, into a single organic unit (OMB, 2014; Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies, 1999; Bollier, 2014; Federici, 2011). This is indeed evident especially in La Base and Can Batlló, where work, living and consumption strive to take place within the territory.

To reinvent the commons within an industrialized society dependent on world-markets means first to re-create communities taking charge of areas of life (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies, 1999). In community economies (Gibson-graham et al, 2013) decisions over the distribution of surplus should be collective, taking into account the enhancement of social and environmental benefits. This is exactly what the assembly processes deciding over the allocation of the common fund of Can Batlló and La Base do. Horizontal and democratic deliberations are hence vital to deciding over the distribution of surplus. Cooperatives are one of the most important ways to democratize ownership, management, wage setting and surplus distribution (Dardot and Laval, 2014), while social and solidarity economy initiatives can establish businesses that meet social and environmental needs (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013). In this way, as the cases foresee, the social and solidarity economy can “put into question the monopoly of the definition of the general interest by the state and the value by the market” (Dardot and Laval, 2014: 502), and represent the occasion for a solidary and cooperative encounter, creating the conditions for the development of a re-embedding of economy in democratic life (Gosetti, 2009). Social and solidarity economy initiatives imply the non-separation between what is normally considered as political activism and economic domain, overcoming the vision of the economy as separated by the social and the political dimension, thus recomposing the relationships between the three domains (Laville, 1998). The cooperativism concept and its idea of gradually extending and generalizing self-management to the wider neighborhood is indeed animated by the vision to scale up or transfer through networking these same cooperative, solidarity and caring principles, to the wider neighborhood and city. What is innovative is the will to further expand the commons

imaginary to upper scales (linked to the relational acceptation of place), the wider neighborhood and city, through the concepts of cooperative neighborhood and the concept of “common city”. The latter emerged in two symposia<sup>145</sup> between various self-managed collectives, organized in Can Batlló and in the Germanetes space. By pooling resources, and integrating the different functions, anti-capitalist commons indeed are conceived as autonomous spaces from which to reclaim control over the conditions of reproduction, to counter the processes of enclosure and increasingly disentangle life from commodity flows (Caffentzis & Federici, 2014).

Hence commons are tightly linked with another radical imaginary emerging from the cases: the concept of autonomy. Autonomy is “a contextual and situated tendency”, a concept that has many trajectories (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006:731). In Castoriadis’ conception, autonomy is the germ of explicit and limitless questioning (self-institution), it is a movement for human emancipation, and a collective project intrinsically associated with self-management, self-government, and self-limitation. While Castoriadis’ intellectual edifice probably provides the most articulated conception of autonomy, other strands of literature have associated autonomy with self-organization, self-determination and self-regulating practices particularly vis-à-vis the state and capitalist social, economic and cultural relations (Katsiaficas, 2006; Flesher Fominaya, 2014; Bohm et al., 2010): autonomy has been the defining element of both autonomist marxism and class-struggle anarchism (Garland, 2010; Leach and Haunss, 2008) and more in general of movements embracing direct action, ecological and social justice, from the Landless Peasant Movement in Brazil and unemployed workers in Argentina (Alvarez and Escobar, 1992; Chatterton, 2005; Esteva and Prakash; Escobar 2008) to the squatters’ and the alterglobalization’s movement (Flesher Fominaya, 2014; Williams, 2008; Cattaneo and Martínez López, 2014).

Böhm et al (2010) identify three strands of meaning in the literature on autonomy: autonomy from capital, autonomy from the state, and autonomy from colonial domination and developmental dependency (ibid). Autonomy from capital takes its inspiration from Italian autonomism and involves a process of working class self-valorization which is autonomous from capitalist valorization, hence advocating the rejection of labour or communist party

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<sup>145</sup> On 4-5 April 2014 a symposium-gathering called “Cooperative Neighborhood, Common City” was organized in Can Batlló, with the participation of actors such as Cooperasec, La Base, La Ciutat Invisible, the Network of Solidarity Economy, LaCol, Ateneu Popular de Nou Barris, Coop57, Expropriated Bank of Gracia, Ateneu Popular La Flor de Maig, l’Observatori Metropolità de Barcelona. On 17 July a follow-up event was organized in the Germanetes space.



unions (Cleaver, 1979). Autonomy from the state includes movements that seek autonomy from political parties and trade unions and is embodied in the ability to say 'no' to existing forms of power and domination which powerful bodies such as the state try to impose upon people. Hence it involves an attempt to escape state legislation, through 'practical negativity' – a prefigurative politics in the 'cracks' that negates an existing state of affairs - and the rejection of the possibility of creating social change through the state (Böhm et al. 2010; Holloway, 2002; 2010; Hardt and Negri, 2009). The third strand can be thought to be the rejection of colonial domination and developmental dependency, including both dependency theory and post-development theory. In the latter case, it is associated with disentanglement from the "development imaginary" and its culture uniformization, and calls for "defensive localization" (Escobar 2001; Böhm et al., 2010).

While this typology is useful, it does not consider the way these three components have been interwoven in social movements' critiques. Nor is it exhaustive, as it leaves out for example the foregrounding role of a politics of place and relocalization, and the connected everyday life transformation (place as a site of becoming, Gibson-Graham, 2006) associated to what could be identified as autonomy from (neoliberal) globalization. Differently from Castells (1983), for several authors local autonomy and self-management are not just reactive and defensive nor the symptom of a social limit and resistance, but can represent an alternative for social change.

For De Filippis (2004), for actors to be autonomous they should be able to transform the relations they are embedded in to allow themselves greater control over them. Hence it follows that they would need to act locally and transform the scale at which capital operates, making it place-bound. Zibechi (2012) also points to the connection of autonomy with territorial control and the creation of "integral life spaces": territorial control facilitates the creation and maintaining of relationships based on use value, solidarity and community, and the disconnection from capital cycles. The case study of the Movement of Unemployed Workers in Argentina, Chatterton (2005) untangles autonomy as composed of three interconnected levels, where an autonomous politics of place made of networked neighborhoods is closely associated with the material level, through disengagement with the formal economy and the creation of a local solidarity economy and a redefinition of work, and to the social level through the construction of a collective subjectivity.

The concept advanced here of prefigurative territories indeed shares strong connections with the concept of “autonomous geographies” (Chatterton, 2005; Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006), “those spaces where people desire to constitute noncapitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social, and economic organization through a combination of resistance and creation” (ibid: 730).

While autonomy is less central in the indignant urban gardens, it is still linked to local, direct impacts people can make in “autonomous communities”, the neighbourhoods. It nevertheless acquires a foregrounding role in the other cases, especially in those that can be thought as the most politicized ones, La Base and Can Batlló. While in Recreant Cruïlles autonomy is articulated mostly at the political and territorial level, as relative autonomy from the district, from political parties and trade unions and as horizontal self-determination through assembly decision-making processes based at the neighbourhood level, in the last two cases a material, economic dimension also emerges. Autonomy represents one of the five principles of La Base, defined as *“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”*.<sup>146</sup> Autonomy foresees the building of a “local base” from which to organize social change, through self-management and cooperative principles to further generalise at neighbourhood and city levels. A cooperative neighborhood and city is hence *“creating spaces where human relations are more plain, without competition, where we can really have a social incisiveness based on values like agroecological, anticapitalism, mutual support”* (I61:74). Likewise, as analysed above, in Can Batlló autonomy is envisioned as both political and place-based, from the (local) state and political parties, as defined through self-management and assembly decision-making processes, and economic, as linked to establishing economic relationships able to progressively delink from capitalist market, through solidarity and social economy initiatives. Finally, the Can Batlló and La Base cases also give a connotation to autonomy that recalls Gorz’s meaning of it as self-determination of needs: autonomy would allow to build an economy able *“to satisfy basic needs of people and with some criteria of environmental sensitiveness and valuing work more than capital, this would be sharing the values of the cooperative movement”* (I53:158).

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<sup>146</sup> See <http://www.labase.info/labase-a-fons/#principis>

Differently from Böhm et al.'s (2010) specification, in these cases the political dimension of autonomy vis-à-vis the state does not however imply that autonomy should aim to reject social change through the state: interstitial transformation envisioned by these cases does not avoid engagement with the state. Indeed, the 15M combines prefigurative practices and appropriation of territories with demands on the state and 'oppositional engagement actions' with the state, including denunciation of 'illegitimate laws' and austerity policies and holding politicians and officials accountable for their actions within the state legal framework (Flesher Fominaya, 2014).

Examples of such an engagement span a wide range of activities and events. These include: the Document of Minimal demands, elaborated during the Square occupation; attacks on what are considered "illegitimate laws" such as the campaign of the "Platform of Mortgages Victims" (PAH) against recourse debt or its "escraches" campaign<sup>147</sup>; the legal campaign against former director Rodrigo Rato of the nationalized Bankia and the 33 members of the board (15MPaRato); protest events such as "marea ciudadanas" (especially in Madrid) against austerity policies in sectors such as education and health; the marches of dignity such those that took place between June and July 2011 (Indignant March for Dignity<sup>148</sup>) and on 22 May 2014<sup>149</sup>; the establishment of encampments against management privatisation for hospitals such as 'Hospital Clinic' and 'Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau' in Barcelona; the symbolic surrounding or "blockading" of parliaments such as the Catalan Parliament in June 2011 and the Spanish Parliament in September 2012; initiatives of the Platform for the Citizens Audit of Debt (PACD); and the birth of parties or citizens' initiatives and platforms linked to 15M such as Partido X, Guanyem Barcelona or Podemos.

Autonomy from the state is intended in these projects more as *relative* autonomy (at the economic level, this is articulated as autonomy for ordinary, everyday management and not for infrastructure works) and as opposed to interference from and subjugation to the local state, and not as the 'practical negativity' of Holloway that denies changes through the state. Although engagement with the state is less important in La Base, it is an important element of

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<sup>147</sup> Following Argentinian 'escraches' campaigns in the 1990s against the impunity of the members of the military junta accused of human rights violation, the 'escraches' of the PAH are pacific direct action campaigns against those parliamentarians that expressed their rejection of the Popular Legislative Initiative proposed by PAH (aiming at, among other things, non-recourse debt).

<sup>148</sup> See [http://wiki.15m.cc/wiki/Marcha\\_popular\\_indignada](http://wiki.15m.cc/wiki/Marcha_popular_indignada)

<sup>149</sup> See [http://wiki.15m.cc/wiki/Madrid\\_22-M,\\_Marchas\\_de\\_la\\_Dignidad](http://wiki.15m.cc/wiki/Madrid_22-M,_Marchas_de_la_Dignidad)

projects such as Recreant Cruïlles and Can Batlló, that are built on municipal land.

Additional reflection here on the relationships between the state and imaginaries of autonomy and commons seem important. Commons cut across different types of commons, including private property and state-owned property (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013:147). They are normally depicted as a third category different from both the state and the private. Nevertheless the literature on commons rarely deals seriously with the relation of commons with the state and the claim for public services. While discourses about autonomy and commons often imply an anti-statism discourse or even disengagement with the state (Hardt and Negri, 2009; Holloway, 2010), an autonomous politics can hardly be completely fulfilled because capital and the state continuously seek to recuperate it and try to make it work for their own purposes (Böhm et al. 2010). Also, to use Harvey's words (2013:153), "the question of the state, and in particular what kind of state (or non-capitalist equivalent), cannot be avoided even in the midst of immense contemporary scepticism".

The challenges social movements face is connecting the struggle over the public with those for the construction of the common so that they reinforce each other (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014). To quote La Ciutat Invisible, "*an unsolved debate emerges in many social movements and self-managed collectives: how do we reappropriate the money and resources that we are producing in other spheres?*" (La Ciutat Invisible, 2014). Both Recreant Cruïlles and Can Batlló indeed show that the idea of the commons could contribute to claiming public services, and to a redefinition of what is intended with "public". Cumbers's (2012) reflections here are interesting. He argues for the concept of "public ownership" in its broadest sense as embracing all those attempts, both outside and through the state, to create forms of collective ownership in opposition to capitalist social relations, hence including both forms of common ownership outside the state as well as those that involve state ownership, although with a renewed democratically controlled form.

As the cases of Recreant Cruïlles and Can Batlló demonstrate, since governments have proven to be poor trustees of public goods and services, the question of public services can be posed from the perspective of the commons, without a withdrawing of responsibility on the part of the state. As Cumbers (2012:137) argues, "the pursuit of autonomy and a commons requires ongoing struggle with the state and capitalist actors rather than the evacuation to some kind of purified outside state".

These cases epitomize commoning initiatives that establish a conflictive, not subordinated cooperation with the state, claiming social rights that were negated or failed to materialize (OMB, 2014), hence can be understood as a new form of “public”, a public from the common or, to put it in the terminology used by La Ciutat Invisible, a reference actor for both La Base and Can Batlló, “new public-cooperative-communitarian models” (La Ciutat Invisible, 2014). This new form of public from the common is made possible through their antagonistic autonomous position and through an engaged involvement with the neighborhood. At the same time, it is also undoubtable that these possibilities were opened thanks to the contingency of neoliberal restructuring (Brenner & Theodore, 2002), and these spaces can be understood as provisional detritus spaces left by capitalism. From an optimistic perspective, this could represent a new model based on the interrelation between public, cooperative and communitarian spheres in which commons movements can force the public administration towards the provision of public spaces and resources, countering privatization trends (ibid): for Dardot and Laval (2014:511), “it has to do with transforming the welfare state administration into institutions of the common”. On the other hand, autonomy is always a field of struggle, and there is a continuous risk that these initiatives be co-opted by government.

As already mentioned above, similarly to Chatterton (2005), autonomy is also intended as territorial groundedness and relocalization. On the one hand, control of space is considered as an antidote against neoliberal globalization’s nefarious effects on the local economy. It is linked to the material-economic component of autonomy through the development of solidarity economies: similarly to Latin-American movements, “re-rooting and regenerating themselves in their own spaces, they are creating effective responses to the ‘global forces’ trying to displace them” (Esteva and Prakash, 1998:26). On the other hand, territorial groundedness is intimately linked with the third radical imaginary that can be detected in all of the cases, which could be grossly labelled as “ecologism”. Restoring economic self-reliance can indeed also be driven by sustainability concerns, and the will to re-embed the economy within local communities and environments (North, 2011; Douthwaite, 1996). This reality is epitomized by an interview excerpt from a participant of La Base:

*“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” (I48:66).*

While of course the indignados movement is not strictly an environmental movement, an ecological component is present in all the cases analysed: from the “ecological acampada” striving to “come full circle” in the Square by producing what was being eaten and caring about its waste and energy consumption, to the flourishing of urban gardens – both as independent projects and as part of wider projects - focused on food sovereignty; from the rejection of (greenfield) “new construction” and the questioning of the urban development model of Recreant Cruïlles and Can Batlló to the longing for environmental amenities, to the recycling efforts of Can Batlló and its objective of energetic self-sufficiency to the permaculture principle of La Base and the mobilization against urban pollution of Recreant Cruïlles.

Hence, an ecological conception of territory that brings nature into the conceptualization of place (Dirlik, 1999) seems to emerge from these cases. As Maria Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999) point out, the distancing of production from reproduction and consumption, worsened by neoliberal globalization, entails ignoring the conditions of production and their social and environmental cost: hence relocalization through the fostering of solidarity economy initiatives is foreseen as one possible way to re-embed our economies within the social and environmental realms. The transformation of everyday life towards the deployment of the “principle of cooperation and responsibility” (Federici, 2011) could hence unfold through the role of territories as a site of becoming (Gibson-Graham, 2006). The permaculture principle as developed by La Base incorporates an ecological conception of territory and a principle of responsibility that takes into consideration both environmental and social dimensions (i.e. the labor relationships involved in the production process). To put it in Ariel Salleh’ words (2009:18), “eco-sufficiency bypasses consumerism and energy wasting international markets. It rests on the logic of permanently reproducing the humanity-nature relations; it is a permaculture”. For Gorz (2009) the norm of sufficiency can only be established with work and productive self-management (in a coordinated structure including private, public and municipal levels), and is hence linked to autonomy, the sphere of self-determined needs and goals that can be steered by a reduction of salaried working time.

The participants of these cases can be depicted as downshifters or “nowtopians” (Carlsson, 2014; Carlsson & Manning, 2010), people that reclaim and reinvent work against the logic of capital, embracing meaningful, collective work, done for its own sake. They also create new forms of self-employment, both through salaries produced by their remunerative activities (as in La Base) and through other means that combine free collective work with standard remunerative activities undertaken within the prefigurative territory (as the carpenters of Can Batlló). Hence, as many participants remarked, because they are working in highly satisfying activities integrated in their lives, the distinction between work and life gets blurred. They get involved in collaborative, convivial consumption (Conill et al. 2012), from co-housing to second-hand barter markets, to nursing cooperatives. As nowtopians and downshifters, their projects are informed and motivated by ecological dysfunction and waste: Can Batlló carpenters donate their wooden waste to use for Can Masdeu’s toilets; recycled and ecological materials are used as much as possible when refurbishing their appropriated territories; vacant urban lots are reclaimed for urban gardens which are nevertheless not intended plainly in their productive dimension; self-repair workshops are organized for bikes and motorbikes; food consumption is sustained through agro-ecological cooperatives; and a Do-it-Yourself ethic animates their activities. As articulated by Carlsson and Manning (2010:925), “a semi-conscious war between these life affirming, self-emancipating behaviour and the coercive domination of money, property, and survival is the kernel of a potentiall revolutionary transformation”.

The commons, autonomy and ecologism/sufficiency imaginaries are also pivotal in the degrowth discourse and movement (D’Alisa et al., 2015), which can be described as the vision of a democratically led, redistributive downscaling of production and consumption in industrialized countries that increases human well-being, environmental sustainability, and social justice (Schneider et al., 2010; Sekulova et al., 2013; Demaria et al., 2013). Indeed, degrowth is not only a critique directed against the growth and development imaginaries, and (increasing) colonization of economic rationality and market values, but also advances a (non or post-capitalist) social-ecological vision centred upon frugality/sufficiency, commons, and autonomy, linked to the decreasing importance of markets and commercial exchanges as a central organizing principle of human lives (Gómez-Baggethun, 2014; Sekulova et al., 2013). These imaginaries are at the core of the repoliticization discouse of degrowth (Demaria et al., 2013), which criticizes the growth ideology not only for its environmental and social justice

effects, but also for the social and cultural premises linked to homo oeconomicus. It opposes the logic of chrematistics with the sufficiency/frugality logic of oikonomia calling for a shift from exchange values to use values by valorising and reclaiming commons - which do not have the built-in dynamics of accumulation and growth (Kallis et al., 2015). These transformations are conceived of as embedded in a democratic process grounded in and oriented towards autonomy, conceived as self-determination of needs and self-limitation.

The grand majority of participants that I have interviewed are indeed familiar with the degrowth concept and share critiques of the capitalist, growth economy. While some of them avow that degrowth is an important component of their social-ecological vision, many of them only understood degrowth in its environmental component of material downshifting, and hence declared that this is an insufficient (although valuable) premise for their envisioned social change. Interestingly, Recreant Cruïlles and La Base (and, understandably, urban gardens) interviewees were visibly more likely to consider degrowth as part of their envisioned social transformation as compared to Can Batlló participants, something that could perhaps be explained by their clearer rootedness in the 15M, of which degrowth was indeed one of the movement's prognostic frames (Asara, forthcoming).

Notwithstanding this diversity, and their eventual framing (or not) of a transformational change as oriented towards degrowth, indignant prefigurative politics very much resemble the grassroots economic practices and social-ecological transformation envisioned by degrowth authors (Petridis, 2014; D'Alisa et al, 2013; Kallis et al., 2015), which emphasize the preponderant role of social movements in steering a degrowth transition.

#### **4.5. Conclusions**

This paper has analysed the development of prefigurative politics and its symbiotic relationship with space in the Indignados movement in Barcelona, forging the new concept of prefigurative territory. It has shown that the movement's prefigurative politics was not self-referential nor posing a tension between strategy/goals actualization and prefiguration. Prefigurative politics produces processual territories that are in tension between the present and the future, and are marked by the spatial production of imaginaries and new types of social relationships grounded in the process of becoming. This study is the first of its type (on the Indignados/Occupy movement) that has not concluded its analysis at the end of the Square occupation, but has tried to understand whether and how the movement has evolved. Prefigurative territories can evolve from the first two dimensions of prefigurative politics, the



means-ends consistency and the proleptic/synecdochic enactment of the future, to the third more powerful building of alternatives, in a way that resonates with Badiou's (2012) fidelity to the inaugural event. Prefigurative territories following on from the Square encampments can also be understood as Lefebvrian counter-spaces involving a more enduring transformation of everyday life through self-management, direct democracy, and determination of new social needs. The building of alternatives is conducted through open prefiguration, continuously opening up the projects to the outside locality and city, engendering a ceaseless process of (re)politicization struggled for from within, through which at the same time a territorial and relational conception of place emerges. Prefigurative politics is hence confrontational, and directly engages with the state.

Another contribution of this paper lies in its answer to the question 'prefiguring what?' which is normally glossed over in social movement literature. Three common and interconnected radical imaginaries have been retrieved and discussed, which in no way pretend to be exhaustive as the cases are quite heterogeneous and have their own specificities. While the concepts of commons and, to a lesser extent, autonomy have been already referred to in some social movement literature (and particularly in the Indignados/Occupy movements), in most cases – e.g. an exception is Chatterton, 2005) - they are taken for granted without further investigating what these concepts mean in activist visions, and how they are articulated in the concrete practices of movements. Ecologism/sufficiency, on the other hand, is a completely forgotten imaginary in the Indignados/Occupy movements. More generally, social movement literature presupposes a watershed between environmental and non-environmental movements. This article investigates the social natures the 15M movement engendered, and shows that an ecologism/sufficiency imaginary is indeed at the core of its transformational vision and practices, from the 'ecological acampada' to the energetic self-sufficiency and the virtually ubiquitous urban gardens.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

*“There are only human beings who act in given conditions and seek through their action to open up a future for themselves. It is up to us to enable a new sense of possibility to blaze a trail. The government of human beings can be aligned with horizons other than those of maximizing performance, unlimited production and generalized control. It can sustain itself with self government that opens onto different relations with others than that of competition between ‘self-enterprising actors’. The practices of ‘communization’ of knowledge, mutual aid and cooperative work can delineate the features of a different world reason. Such an alternative reason cannot be better designated than by the term reason of the commons.” (Dardot and Laval, 2013: 356)*

This thesis has ventured into a new field, using an innovative research approach and a composite theoretical framework. It has focused on an in-depth, embedded (5 prefigurative territories, but also many different fieldsites such as assemblies and commissions) and longitudinal ethnographic case study in Barcelona spanning over three years of fieldwork, to shed light not only on the Indignados’ movement and its evolution, but also on how movements dynamics can help better understand, through an extended theoretical or analytical generalization (Yin, 2004), alternative democratic visions and visions of social-ecological transformation. Following Touraine (1978), studying social movements indeed means observing the profound changes of society and the fundamental problem of modernity from a privileged position: that of social change.

As put it by Arundhati Roy, “Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day I can hear breathing” (cited by Loftus, 2012). In this thesis I have adopted Gibson-Graham and Roelvink’s (2010) call to act as an experimental researcher, opening to what can be learned from what is happening on the ground, bridging between ‘what is’ and ‘what could be’ by embedding future possibilities within present praxis (White and Williams, 2012), reading the democratic and alternative prefigurative practices and social-natures as they slowly and gradually emerge from the ‘microcosmos’ of the acampada.

The merit of this thesis does not lie in comparing multiple cases and analyzing their similarities and differences, but in the deep and longitudinal knowledge of the empirical phenomenon of study, with the objective of analyzing how a movement radically questioning the management and interpretation of the economic crisis, and putting center stage the meta-question of democracy, can produce cognitive and material social-natures that can prefigure

alternative futures. As I have shown, the Indignados' movement is concerned with social-ecological transformation. Further, this movement has given prominence to the degrowth critique, while the imaginaries it has prefigured are arguably central imaginaries for the degrowth movement and scholarship.

In this section I will discuss how the previous chapters have answered the research questions I outlined at the outset of the thesis, and will provide some overall reflections for a possible degrowth conceptualization of democracy and of social-ecological transformation.

The overall research questions for the wider thesis were specified as:

1. How does a social movement claiming for 'real democracy' envisage and practice such democracy? What does this tell us about how a social-ecological transformation to degrowth may take place?
2. What is signified by the Indignados' movement? Why and how does the indignados' movement reconfigure space and nature?
3. Why should a deep democracy espouse degrowth? How and why do democracy and degrowth relate to one another? What theory of democracy is apt for a degrowth transition?

Combining the use of the framing perspective and examination of transformative events I have analysed the genesis and evolution of the Indignados' movement in Barcelona. This has enabled a greater understanding of the cognitive dimension of the movement as well as later developments such as the formation of two main factions within the movement. The identification of the diagnostic and prognostic frames opened the way for two contributions to the social movement studies literature. One is with regard to the neater distinction between frames and ideologies, and the rejection of some New Social Movement authors' postulates denying the role of ideologies within new movements. While the square was animated by what I called the "political identity divesting group" conducive to strengthening solidarity and deliberations within an heterogeneous mass of people and to fostering collective identity that transformed a crowd into a movement, and while ideologies' importance was denied in the pragmatist splinter group focused on 'methodology' and technopolitics, within the bigger autonomous faction the importance of different ideologies is recognized. Instead of engendering an identitarian closure, in the autonomous faction ideological heterogeneity (within certain limits) is thought to enrich the movement and is dealt with by consensus and assembly decision-making processes. Ideologies are also important in the gradual radicalization process that occurred within the movement, whereby the critique gradually

moved from anger at politicians and bankers, to a more systemic and articulated critique. In addition to the indignation motivational frame, I have detected diagnostic frames criticizing economism, and pointing at a counter-revolution and a crisis of values. These frames, together with the prognostic frame targeting what I thought could be aptly rendered by using Brand and Wissen's (2012) expression 'imperial mode of living', have shown how, differently from predominant social movements theorists' reading of the Indignados, 15M was not complaining about the failure of austerity policies to restart the growth of Spanish economy, and did not witness a resurgence of materialistic claims as opposed to post-materialistic ones, but questions the very distinction between materialistic and post-materialistic values. Liberal democracy is criticized not for its "failure to induce economic growth" (Della Porta, 2013a:81): the naturalization of the need for economic growth is put in discussion in the Indignados. The movement is concerned with a wider meta-political question, linking 'real democracy' with a critique of the social imaginary of contemporaneous society (including individualism, consumerism and competition), social justice and the claim for a different economic model not based on growth. A degrowth discourse intersecting with a social reproduction and a care economy discourse was also detected by Calle Collado (2013). As also stated on the national manifesto of the first anniversary of the movement:

*"Economy has to be at the service of general wellbeing and of support and care of the environment, not of private profit. Work has to be valued for its social utility, not for its commercial and financial productivity (...) We demand policies that understand that the model change will be ecological or will not be. These policies have to start from a simple premise: the ecosystems equilibrium cannot be spoiled for a simple profit motives."*

Offe (2011) notes that post-democracy is a challenge for sociologically informed political theorists to come up with designs for remedial innovations of liberal democracy. Yet, the Indignados' movement points to another model of democracy, different from liberal democracy.

I have analyzed the type of democracy conceptualization advanced by the movement. Real democracy is somehow differently articulated in the two factions. The pragmatist faction does not reject representation but envisions a participatory democracy where representative institutions improve their democratic quality by various means such as technopolitics, a more representative electoral system with injection of participation in representative institutions and the continuous control exerted by citizens through consultation and participation processes, and suppression of politicians' privileges. In the autonomous faction the democratic goal-

vision is perceived to be a generalized system of direct democracy and self-management, including the economic realm. Both visions denounce the ‘undemocratic character’ of formal liberal democracy where democratic practices are limited to ‘unrepresentative’ elections and economic powers are dominant over political decisions. Both, but especially the participatory-representative vision also presuppose claims for the enhancement of social rights (housing, work, health, education, culture) that are currently degraded by a neoliberal governmentality, and appeal to citizens’ dignity: democracy is not just a formal procedure for electing representatives but should guarantee a dignified life and social well-being.

As pointed out by Brown (2015) and Dardot and Laval (2013), neoliberalism is quietly undoing basic elements of democracy, from principles of justice, to democratic imaginaries, creating its own criteria of validity and new practices of subjectivization founded on the economization of every dimension of human life epitomized in the ‘entrepreneurial man’, ‘the sovereign consumer’. Still, the Indignados offer reasons for hope, as one of their main objectives was precisely the targeting of economism and the opposition to the abduction of democracy by economic and corporate powers. Hence, in line with Swygendouw (2009), these objectives can be viewed as irruptions of the political that transgress and transform the hegemonic symbolic order.

In the second chapter I analysed one possible relevant conceptualization of democracy for degrowth, following an inspiring theoretical contribution from philosopher Castoriadis. Unraveling the Castoriadian concept of autonomy, the chapter showed that democracy is the self-institution of society ingrained in the concepts of creation, autonomy and radical imaginary. Castoriadis does not understand democracy as a set of procedures, and questions false assumptions present in representative democracies such as formal equality. His substantive conception of democracy is based upon the premise that “there cannot be a society without a definition of shared substantive values, which forms an essential part of the social imaginary significations, defining the ‘thrust’ of each society” (Castoriadis, 1996:267-292). For Castoriadis, a procedural conception of democracy stems from the contemporary crisis, linked to individualism, of imaginary significations concerning the goals of collective life, ultimately dissociating all discussions relative to these purposes of political regime (ibid). Democracy is thus a regime aiming at the realization of both individual and collective autonomy, and the common good as conceived by concerned society. For Castoriadis, democracy can only be conceived as direct democracy, hence including (recallable and rotating) delegates, but excluding representation. It also necessarily involves the institution of

“self-government of collectivities at all levels of social life” (Castoriadis, 1997:361-418), including the economic realm.

15M constitutes a space for the radicalization of democracy through the construction of spheres of deliberative democracy (Della Porta, 2013a; Calle Collado, 2013). An explosion of initiatives oriented towards the construction of alternative economic and political practices, puts horizontal and assembly-based processes at the centre, from barter markets to urban gardens, cooperatives, self-work, solidarity economy initiatives, agro-ecology groups etc. As the 15M put it in the Square: ‘no-one represents us’. Both factions’ conceptualizations point at a radicalization and deepening of democracy, and can be thought of as complementary. The representative-participatory vision can open up institutions to citizens and implement what Gorz called ‘non reformist reforms’ in the political, economic and social domains. At the same time the multiplication of inclusive deliberative spheres, horizontal processes for managing diversity and self-managing commons and economic experiments work at the grassroots level, by expanding self-management and functioning as what Gorz called ‘autonomous sphere’, where individual flourishing, self-production, mutual and cooperative relationships can develop and increasingly expand.

Their alternative models of democracy are thereby close to the original participatory democracy models of Pateman and Macpherson, envisioning democratic systems as including economic democracy (Johanisova and Wolf, 2012). The vision of the autonomous faction is close to Castoriadis’ and Lefebvre’s conceptualizations of self-government and self-management. The retrenchment of the welfare state and the connected reduction of representative systems’ ‘legitimacy by output’ are part of an overall legitimacy crisis linked to the domination of the political by the economic domain, which can partly explain the search for alternatives outside of representative systems.

The project of autonomy for Castoriadis is both an end and a guide, but does not involve determined solutions or a pseudo-concrete utopia, as it is a continuous open-ended, collective, creative and dynamic process. It is key to social change and emancipation and involves questioning of institutions, the appropriation of the instituting power of the radical imaginary to create social imaginary significations. The Indignados in this sense enable a departure from the pseudo-concrete utopia, by examining on the ground new institutions and significations they gave rise to, and questioning the hegemonic social imaginary significations and institutions. In the fourth chapter I then explored the autonomous faction in greater depth,

investigating the creation of new institutions and significations. Although these are partial, and impossible to completely prescind from the overall societal system in which they are embedded, they can provide important sparks of reflection. Before revisiting the fourth chapter however, I would nevertheless focus on another contribution from the second chapter based on the philosophy of Castoriadis, which together with the reflections provided in the theoretical framework on democracy (§ 1.2.2.1) on the occasion of Romano's depiction of the degrowth-democracy ensemble as 'wishful thinking', can help answer the question 'why deep democracy should espouse degrowth'. For Castoriadis, democracy is not limited to effective and real participation in decision-making, that is direct democracy: democracy is the self-institution of society, and as a movement towards autonomy presupposes another culture, other needs, it presupposes "that the economic cease to be the dominant value", another way of life, a frugal life.

Contrarily to what Romano (2012) argues, there is no tension between the 'proceduralism' of democracy and 'consequentialism' of green concerns. Castoriadian democracy is a substantive conception of democracy that does not fall into relativism, and hence is not tantamount to proceduralism. Indeed, as I showed in the introductory chapter, 'proceduralist' liberal democracy is far from being neutral to conceptions of the common good, and with neoliberalism it leads to prioritizing 'the economic' over 'the political'. Democracy is the regime that aims to realize individual and collective autonomy and common good as conceived by society, and involves a revolutionary movement, a cultural creation that also institutes alternative institutions.

If we read the Indignados' movement through Castoriadis, and as an insurgent, although partial and limited movement towards autonomy, we can also understand the empirical manifestation of a movement positing a conceptualization of deep democracy, contemporaneously to and deeply entangled in environmental concerns, We can also understand why it gave life to imaginary significations different from hegemonic one, as analysed in the fourth chapter.

The fourth chapter tried to untangle the concept of prefigurative politics that has been much referred to in attempts to analyze the Indignados /Occupy movements, without nevertheless much deep conceptualization by either critics or supporters. My interest in the concept is rooted in the very fact that it was the most suitable theoretical tool available at the time I was making ethnographic observations: the Square was clearly a symbolic and material social

nature, prefiguring a utopian world, and upon decentralization to the neighborhoods the emphasis was put on the creation of alternatives. It was a challenging endeavour to study further the evolution of the movement: would it have perished, as Polletta (1999) predicted for prefigurative free spaces, under the weight of its utopian aspirations? Or would it have been able to manage its horizontal impulses somehow, forming a manageable structure that would ensure effective decision-making and coordination? Immediately following the ‘acampada’ I became particularly interested in the Inter-neighborhood Coordination Space (INCS), because for me this was a pivotal organ for understanding the success of the movement. But I was partially mistaken: although the INCS continued for almost three years, it was not very successful. This was due to the decision not to devolve decision-making powers to (rotating) delegates, so for each decision the space had to take, it was necessary to wait for the next INCS, which took place every 45-60 days, to enable delegates to discuss the topics of interest within their assemblies, the sovereign organs, first. The INCS thus evolved mainly into an organ (albeit a useful one) for providing information, or a networking space in which all the assemblies could be updated about the events and other developments taking place in the other neighborhoods, with a website and a mailing list compiling all the different activities.

Another reason for the ‘limited success’ of the INCS was probably also connected to the fact that it (could not) develop a shared project, limiting its potential as a coordination space. Ultimately a shared project can only materialize if there is control over space and social reproduction, and activities can be self-managed. However, neighborhood assemblies and the INCS were gradually losing grip over participants because discussions often lacked a field of application, or were too abstract, which led to a gradual loss of motivation. It became gradually more evident to me that interesting projects were gaining ground in the neighborhoods, and that, although the number of people taking part in neighborhood assemblies was decreasing, these territorialized projects were somehow counterbalancing the loss of participation in the neighborhood assemblies and animating the enthusiasm of people. The cases I analysed in the fourth chapter, and other cases that sprouted in Barcelona, are concrete projects, where people sought to make a difference in their locales and to create a sense of place (Agnew, 1987), while also living and enacting the alternative social-natures they were envisioning. In this second stage of my research, I thus focused on the autonomous faction, as these territorialized projects stemmed from this (predominant) splinter group. I imagined that the prefigurative politics concept, which for me was a useful tool for grasping



the utopian dimension of the movement, was not detached or separate from the construction of alternatives. Rather it could explain and contain in itself the passage, or diachronic development and evolution, from prefiguration intended merely as synecdochically representing an envisioned future and embodying consistency between means and ends (as in consensus decision-making processes), to something having a wider breath, the enactment of some alternatives. In the fourth chapter I showed how the enactment of alternatives was hence intimately tied to the appropriation of, and material intervention into the space itself, through the new concept of prefigurative territory, a notion that can grasp the Lefebvrian symbiotic relationship between new social relationships and the production of space.

Prefigurative territories emerge in the contestations of everyday life. They are processual political spaces in tension between the present and the future, sites of becoming marked by self-management and the production of alternative imaginaries and social-natures. I showed that the building of alternatives is borne of demonstration, experimentation and proliferation, and that the strategic dimension of prefiguration lies in the way that goals are collectively determined and a transformational vision animates material practices. Open prefiguration means that projects are not 'exit' strategies, spaces outside of hegemonic social relationships, nor are they Foucaultian heterotopias, but interstices in the centre of the city, continuously involved in efforts to open them up to the wider, non-activist environment.

I have identified some of the imaginaries common to the prefigurative territories analysed. Commons imply an integration of production, reproduction, consumption and governance. They also involve commoning, that is forms of cooperation, mutual bonds and an ethic of care. In the form of cooperatives and solidarity economy initiatives they embody forms of economic democracy, and nurture an up-scaling vision through networking by means of the cooperativism concept. The commons concept is at the base of the cooperative neighborhood and common city concepts and can be thought as intimately linked to the other two imaginaries, ecologism/sufficiency and autonomy. By pooling resources and integrating different functions, prefigurative territories as commons can gradually disentangle from commodity flows and gain autonomy from capital through solidarity economy initiatives connected to a politics of place focused on (networking) neighbourhoods. Prefigurative territories are envisioned as the local base from which to organize social change. Also, instead of being detached from or not engaging with the state (as in Böhm et al., 2010; Maeckelbergh, 2009), all of the cases studied claim political autonomy as sovereign decision-making through assembly processes, and in a conflictual relationship, pretend the expansion

and support of their common and public goods by the state. Their economic meaning of autonomy (from capitalist market) is also linked to Gorz's meaning of autonomy as self-determination of needs, and is linked to an acceptance of work that not only encompasses Carlsson and Manning's (2010) free collective work, but can also give rise to self-employment. Autonomy as self-determination of needs is linked to the ecologism/sufficiency principle, where the ecological conception of territory is linked to the commons' integration of production and consumption spheres, fomenting convivial and collaborative consumption, re-use, recycling, self-reparation and a Do-it-Yourself ethic, permaculture principles and striving to bring nature into the city. As highlighted by Barry (2012), frugality, voluntary simplicity, refusal to consume and buy and instead doing it oneself or with others, mutuality, reciprocity, celebrations and collaborative consumption or simply slowing down, can serve to liberate desire and in so doing create a post-scarcity sustainable economy of desire. Sufficiency involves exchanging desire and pleasure for the consumption and accumulation of things, to enjoyment of experiences and relationships: the social dimension of these practices, deploying alternative sources of non-consumerist, non commodified pleasure is an important source of resistance to consumer capitalism (ibid).

These indignant prefigurative territories are important for a degrowth social-ecological transformation because they allow one to posit that interstitial transformation can be an important leeway towards degrowth. Interstitial transformation is not about the creation of exodus spaces (Holloway, 2010) fleeing from confrontation and struggle. While new forms of social empowerment and alternative institutions are built with (an) objective of gradually becoming less dependent on capitalist markets, they push against the state to gradually expand those spaces while forcing it to supply more public goods. These spaces can keep society open to alternative futures, showing that different ways of working and living are possible, gradually eroding the constraints themselves.

As highlighted by Deriu (2008), simple voluntarism will be insufficient to undo our dependence on the growth economy. This can only occur through a change in relationships and an upsurge of forms of sociality that weaken the significations of consumerism and productivism, strengthening other forms of identity and recognition (ibid). Social experimentation through new ways of shared and community living, consuming, producing, and distributing can all be an important passage to a degrowth social-ecological transformation (Gorz, 2009). Changes in imaginary significations and the emergence of radical imaginaries such as commons, sufficiency/ecologism and autonomy are important for

creating a 'post-scarcity sustainable economy of desire' (Barry, 2012). Prefigurative territories can force the state not only to provide more in the form of commons, but also to democratize public services, as highlighted by the concept of 'public from the commons'.

As envisioned by Bobbio, a system of integral democracy can contain forms of representativeness as well as direct democracy, in a continuum, where direct democracy and the movement towards Castoriadian autonomy and democracy is the 'ideal-limit'. However this does not have to rule out participatory democracy through the state and representative institutions, as symbiotic transformation, that is, non-reformist reforms aiming at extending and deepening institutional forms of social empowerment involving the state and civil society (Olin Wright, 2012) is an important complement for interstitial transformation, opening up greater spaces for interstitial strategies to work.

Hence a relevant future development of this thesis would be to analyse new important political actors evolving from the Indignados' movement, such as Barcelona en Comú and Podemos. The former will be particularly interesting to study in case it wins the forthcoming city elections. In the optimistic scenario, such a victory could open the way for a social-ecological transformation carried along the three paths identified by Olin Wright: interstitial, symbiotic and partially ruptural transformation (the seizure of the local state).

## Annex: List of Interviews and focus groups<sup>150</sup>

NUMBER of Interview	AGE group <sup>151</sup>	SEX	GROUP <sup>152</sup>
1	1	F	Sant Andreu neighborhood assembly
2	1	M	International C.
3	1	M	International C
4	1	F	S.Andreu neighborhood A.(self-managed health group)
5	1	F	Culture C., Outraged University, Degrowth C.
6	3	M	Square participant, Procés Constituent
7	1	M	Poblenou neighborhood A., Flor de Maig
8	2	M	Nou Barris neighborhood A.
9	2	F	Gracia neighborhood A.
10	1	M	Sants Neighborhood A.
11	2	F	Sarrià-St. Gervasi neighborhood A.
12	2	F	Poble Sec neighborhood A.
13	1	F	Education C., Degrowth C.
14	2	F	Communication C.
15	2	F	Sant Antoni Neighborhood A.
16	1	F	Degrowth C.
17	1	M	Square participant (Economy C.,)
18	1	M	Square participant
19	2	M	Square participant, Alternatives C.
20	2	M	Education C.
21 Focus G.	2-3	Mixed	Sant Andreu neighborhood A.
22		F	Health C.
23	3	M	Sants neighborhood A.
24	1	M	RDN
25	1	M	Popular Consultation group, Electoral System Reform C.
26	1	M	Gracia neighborhood A.
27	3	M	Poble Sec neighborhood A.
28	1	F	Square participant
29	2	M	Dreta de l'Eixample neighborhood A.
30 Focus G.	1-2	Mixed	PACD, International C., Culture C.
31	1	F	PAH - Poble Sec neighborhood A.
32 Focus G.	1	M	X-Party, RDN
33	2	F	X-Party
34	2	F	RDN, La Dispersa group
35	2	F	Global Square of Tunis World Social Forum
36	2	F	PACD
37	2	M	Square participant
38	2	M	Square participant, Flor de Maig
39	2	M	Catalan Integral Cooperative
40	1	F	Square Garden/Xino Garden
41	2	M	Pl. Catalunya garden

<sup>150</sup> The interviewees' names reported at times in this thesis when citing interviews' extracts have been changed so as to guarantee anonymity.

<sup>151</sup> Age is divided into three groups: 1) from 20 years to 35; 2) from 36 years to 50 years; 3) from 51 years to 75 years.

<sup>152</sup> "C." stands for Commission, and "A." stands for Assembly.

42	1	M	Fort Pienc Garden
43	1	F	Xino Garden
44	3	F	Poble Nou Indignant Garden
45	1	F	Xino Garden
46	3	M	Forat de la Vergonya Garden
47	2	M	Poble Nou Indignant Garden
48	1	M	Ateneu La Base (La Seca)
49	1	M	Ateneu La Base (La Igualitaria)
50	1	F	Ateneu La Base
51	1	M	Ateneu La Base (Espai de trobada)
52	2	M	Ateneu La Base (La Seca, Altaveu)
53	3	M	Ateneu La Base
54	3	M	Ateneu La Base & Can Batlló
55 (Focus G.)	1	F	Can Batlló, Space Design C.
56	1	M	Can Batlló (LaCol, Coópolis, La Borda)
57	2	M	Can Batlló (garden)
58	1	F	Can Batlló (LaCol, Coópolis, La Borda)
59	1	F	Can Batlló (garden)
60	3	M	Can Batlló (Strategy C., Coópolis, La Borda)
61	1	M	Can Batlló (Carpentry C.)
62	3	M	Can Batlló (SSC, Negotiation C., Strategy C.)
63	3	F	Can Batlló (Bar C., Activities C.)
64	2	F	Can Batlló (Bar C., La Canya)
65	3	M	Can Batlló (Infrastructure C.)
66	2	M	Can Batlló (garden)
67	1	M	Recreant Cruïlles (garden)
68	3	M	Recreant Cruïlles (Neighborhood Association)
69	2	M	Recreant Cruïlles (Public Space C.)
70	3	M	Recreant Cruïlles
71	1	F	Recreant Cruïlles
72	1	F	Recreant Cruïlles
73	1	M	Recreant Cruïlles (Public Space C.)
74	2	M	Recreant Cruïlles
75	1	M	Recreant Cruïlles
76	1	M	Can Batlló, La Ciutat Invisible
77	2	M	La Ciutat Invisible
78 Focus G.	2	Mixed	Can Batlló (Paideia)
79 Focus G.	1-2	Mixed	Square (Facilitation Flotilla)
80	2	M	Square participant

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