

Final Report

Executive Summary

Project: Commons Coproduction and territorial development in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (cast: Coproducción pro-común y desarrollo territorial en el Área Metropolitana de Barcelona)

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Abstract

The project analyses the concentration and territorial articulation of pro-common co-production initiatives (initiatives through which citizens provide themselves with services with the support of local governments) in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (AMB) and their effects in terms of territorial development and socio-environmental justice. To do this, the project unfolds into a statistical analysis based on existing maps, and two territorialised case studies.

According to the statistical analysis, commons initiatives represent 40% of the 1,160 citizen initiatives mapped within the AMB. Commons activity is concentrated in 40% of the city of Barcelona. If we talk about it by sector, 50% of the common initiatives are in the "agro-ecology, energy and environment" and "culture and leisure" sectors. Approximately one third of this activity is carried out in collaboration with the government, which is mainly local.

The case studies show that commons initiatives have a positive impact on the promotion of the associative fabric and environmentally friendly value chains, as well as on social cohesion and the integration of vulnerable groups. The studies also illustrate the relative importance of different initiatives according to their position in the information and cooperation networks between them. Successful experiences of collaboration with the public administration are also highlighted, but also a certain sense of frustration and skepticism.

Key words: urban commons, co-production, Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, local public economy, spatial analysis, case study

1. Introduction & justification

The financial crisis of 2008, the austerity policies that followed it and the urban uprisings around the planet during 2011 (Arab Spring, 15M, Occupy Wall Street, etc.) revealed the inability of governments to meet the growing social needs of the population and, at the same time, gave rise to the emergence of new citizen responses that offered solutions outside the state and the market. The diversity and nature of these initiatives is vast, including from cooperatives of the social and solidarity economy, to agro-ecological food consumption networks or informal family-care groups.

In Catalonia, and more specifically in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, citizen initiatives have recently been studied and mapped out through various research projects using different conceptual frameworks (social innovation, social and solidarity economy, collaborative housing, etc.). However, the territorial dimension of these initiatives and their impact on territorial development has not been studied in-depth. To fill this gap, the project and findings presented here include a spatial characterization of the citizen initiatives that populate the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, with a focus on those featuring the characteristics of “commons initiatives”. Secondly, the project analyzes the territorial impact of said initiatives.

In commons initiatives, the direct users of the good or service produced are also responsible for producing and/or managing it collectively - (Benkler, 2007). More generally, the “commons” paradigm propose a reinterpretation of the economy, beyond the dichotomy between the market and the Modern Welfare State, from which to re-integrate the economic and the ethical, the individual and the collective (Foster and Iaione 2015). Building on this paradigm, the project questions whether “common co-production initiatives” as articulated and rooted in a certain geographical space, can give rise to alternative models of territorial development that are socially and environmentally just. In this aim, we ask the following research questions: Does the concentration of common co-production initiatives, articulated and rooted in a certain territory, produce socially and environmentally fair models of territorial development?

The research consisted on two levels of analysis. The first level included a large-n, quantitative analysis of citizen initiatives including a focus on the subset of commons initiatives. The second level included two case studies of the initiatives in two neighborhoods.

To define conceptual the boundaries of urban commons, we carried a literature review, run an expert workshop, and carried a pilot coding of initiatives. Overall, we selected 4 commons initiatives criteria:

1. **Prosumer.** In prosumer initiatives, the good or service is produced by the users themselves, at least in some phase of the productive process (which includes its governance).
2. **Internal democracy.** Key in the organization of commons initiatives is the possibility that citizens participate in decision making processes of the initiative. We distinguish three degrees of internal democracy: Without Internal Democracy, Basic., and Advanced.
3. **Transformation aim:** We understand that commons have the aspiration to produce a kind of long-term socio-environmental change through the promotion of alternative, i.e., non-commodity based, models of development. We divided this aim into two levels, i.e., internal and external, and also into two dimensions, social and environmental.

4. **Nature of alternative.** A key definition of commons which emerges from the literature as much as from the initiatives themselves, and the ways in which they self-represented, as being alternatives to the welfare state, to the market or to both.

When analyzing our database according to 4 above criteria, we had to adjust our initial scope. We therefore decided to use the prosumer criteria (common denominator to all theoretical traditions) as the main variable to classify the initiatives as commons and then use the rest of the variables to further explore variation across prosumer and non-prosumer groups of initiatives.

In addition to the criteria and categorisation of citizens' initiatives existing there was the question of coproduction, a key term in our theoretical framework. Thus, to fit the idea of co'-production, initiatives had to fulfill three criteria: (1) the initiatives had to be **productive** (have a tangible outcome, be it a good, a service or knowledge); (2) they had to involve the participation of users in the production processes (either as peer-producer or *prosumers*); (3) and they had to have some form of **collaboration with public authorities** at any level.

After creating the new database and map of citizen initiatives and running some preliminary analysis (e.g., concentration of initiatives per neighborhood) we proceeded with the second stage of the project, i.e. the two case studies. We used neighborhoods as the sampling unit to select the cases. We selected neighborhoods with high concentration of commons (i.e., prosumer) initiatives in relation to the population and relatively similar socio-demographic (i.e., census) features. To collect the data, we run semi-structured interviews with representatives of the commons initiatives in each of the neighborhoods. Additionally, we applied a social network survey to understand their relationships.

2. Main findings

General statistics and territorial distribution

- Commons initiatives represent 40% of the 1,160 citizen initiatives in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area.
- 75% of all commons initiatives belong to the Services sector; 15% Goods and services, 5% to knowledge
- In terms of economic sectors, commons initiatives constitute 56% of citizens' initiatives in Agroecology, energy and environment, 55% in technology and logistics and 54% in housing, followed by Health and mutual support at 46%, culture and leisure at 34%, education and knowledge at 27% and consulting and ethical financing at 22%.
- Half of commons initiatives belong to the categories of "Agro-ecology, energy and environment" and "Culture and leisure".
- In terms of co-production, approximately one third of activities are carried out in some degree of relationship, and at times in collaboration, with the public administration, mainly at the municipal level.
- 77% of all initiatives in our database were since the year 2000; more than half since 2010.
- In terms of spatial concentration, 40% of commons activities are located within the boundaries of the City of Barcelona.
- Important clusters were also found in the municipalities of L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, Sant Cugat del Valles, Cerdanyola del Vallès, el Prat de Llobregat, Badalona and Santa Coloma de Gramenet.

Case studies

- There are different “commons” initiatives in both study sites with consolidated internal democracy and a markedly transformative character.
- The social networks of the two neighborhoods are a reflection of the neighborhood's associative and cultural history and show a sense of belonging to the neighborhood or city.
- There are important differences across “commons” initiatives in terms of the roles they play within the networks that relate them with each other and with other social and public organizations
- City/town governments were frequently mentioned by the surveyed representatives of “commons” initiatives as being part of their network of relationships
- The territorial impact of the initiatives is highlighted with regard to both economic, social and environmental aspects.
- The most prominent economic impact is the promotion and development of the social and cooperative economic model within the neighborhoods/districts.
- The most prominent social impact is the promotion of social cohesion and inclusion
- The most prominent environmental impact is the participation and promotion of environmentally friendly value chains.
- The relationship between “commons” initiatives and the public administration is not uniform. There are experiences of success but also of frustration and skepticism.
- Only half plus one of the initiatives considered as commons recognize themselves in this sense. Those that do not do so either because they have not proposed it or because they associate the term with certain political ideals and parties.

Bringing together the different strands of the project, it is apparent that commons activities reflect wider economic patterns of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area. This is visible both in terms of sector development and in terms of absolute spatial distribution and concentration of initiatives. At the same time, once concentration is analyzed at the neighbourhood scale, and with a multi-sectorial approach looking at degrees of connectivity, such as betweenness, longer institutional and civic organization histories play an important role in explaining their development and consolidation over time.

3. Recommendations

The current social, labor and housing precariousness, the expansion of an economic model that generates inequality, or the culture of leisure focused on consumption, have progressively hindered social cohesion and citizen participation in public affairs. This study and the mapping of initiatives more specifically, illustrates the proliferation and of a number of commons initiatives within the AMB, as well as a somewhat unequal distribution across neighborhoods. This unequal concentration shall be taken into account when designing territorial policies. Still, there is an overarching need of a change in the way public authorities relate to the territory. This change can be synthesized in three points. First, formulating policies requires new public management expertise that can make the best of citizen self-organization and collective uses. Secondly, it is important to distinguish between the social and solidarity economy and the commons economy (i.e., based on prosumer initiatives). Finally, there is the need to promote an administrative culture (e.g., among public policy makers and street-level managers) whereby

governmental support to citizens' projects does not mean the subordination, control or appropriation of these by the government. In this vein, an important change would be the simplification of administrative procedures and the promotion of ad hoc measures to guarantee, or at least not hinder, commons activities (for example, in the case of child care groups, the required licenses makes the collective organization of participants more difficult).

That said, the purpose of policies shall be different depending on whether there is social and critical mass or not. In the first case the role shall be of accompaniment and facilitation. In the second, it may be worthier to explore alternative actions such as training, dissemination of knowledge or generation of opportunities to share ideas and experiences. These actions shall create momentum around citizen participation and in turn contribute to the better implementation and effectiveness of future territorial policies. The way in which policies are implemented is also important, and the creation of municipal and supra-municipal spaces that work independently of the political context and give continuity and contribute to the implementation of the policies. In this line, it is important to have street level agents in the territory that work directly with the commons initiatives and entities, and thus understand their unique needs and potential for public management.