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Untangling the radical imaginaries of the
Indignados' movement: Commons, autonomy and
ecologism

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Untangling the radical imaginaries of the Indignados' movement: Commons, autonomy and ecologism

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Abstract

The 'movements of the squares' involved first and foremost an awakening or re-discovering of the radical imagination both in the square encampments, and in later projects created with the movements' decentralizations. The new alternative projects born after the square have materialized the movements' radical imaginaries in urban environments, extending and deepening concerns of broad political change over everyday life. Based on ethnographic work on the Indignados' movement in the city of Barcelona, this paper delves more particularly into three Indignant urban projects. It untangles three common and interlinked radical imaginaries both embodied and actualized in participants' social practices, and further orienting their future visions: commons, autonomy and ecologism. Scrutinizing their meaning, it also sheds light on connected issues such new ways of interfacing with local state authorities and redefining the boundaries between the public and the common. It shows that the ecologism imaginary cannot be properly grasped if disconnected from the other two imaginaries, and argues that a transformative eco-politics can only be claimed as such if it is able to articulate such an integrated vision typical of 'socio-environmental movements'.

Keywords: Indignados, imaginary, movement of the squares, commons, autonomy, environment

1. Introduction

The 'movement of the squares' involved first and foremost an awakening - or re-discovering, to put it with Graeber's (2011) words, of the radical imagination. Staging extensive deliberations in their numerous assemblies, these occupations were about 'opening up possibilities by challenging our political imaginaries and cognitive maps' (Arditi 2012, p.2), rupturing the post-political neoliberal consensus (Flesher Fominaya 2017). The creation of new communal spaces and projects created in the square represented the continuous materialization, in the here and now, of new radical imaginaries (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014, Dikeç and Swyngedouw 2017). The occupied squares from Plaça Catalunya to Syntagma Square, and the encampments in green public spaces from Zuccotti Park to Gezi Park were prefiguring a different world through their production of new space, from collective kitchens to community gardens, cleaning committees and art spaces, self-organized kindergartens and common libraries, reminding us of the importance of space for the enactment of alternative imaginaries (Asara and Kallis forthcoming).

The new political imaginary sprouted in these ephemeral communal spaces need nevertheless to be 'embodied and practised within the times and spaces of everyday life' in order to open up a politicizing sequence after the square occupations (Dikeç and Swyngedouw 2017, p.9). This opens up a still unripe debate on the afterlife of this cycle of mobilization (Fernandez Savater et al. 2017). Indeed, several works have recognized the role of the squares movements in fostering new alternative projects and forms of social organization based on solidarity and

collective self-empowerment in their aftermath (Asara and Kallis forthcoming, Varvarousis et al. 2017, Flesher Fominaya 2017, Varvarousis and Kallis 2017). From solidarity economy initiatives, food banks and cooperatives to community gardens, social centres and other self-organized spaces, in Spain and elsewhere these alternative projects emerging after the square encampments have spatialized the movement's radical imaginaries in urban environments, extending and deepening concerns of broad political change over everyday life (Asara and Kallis forthcoming, Varvarousis et al. 2017, Hadjimichalis 2013, Karaliotas 2016). They represent the sedimentation and further development of Indignant radical imaginaries, that is their translation and social embeddedness through different social and political arenas (Nelson 2003), transforming our cities into laboratories for radical experimentation (Loftus 2012).

What though, are these common Indignant imaginaries? What kind of alternative vision are they enacting? Surprisingly, scant analytic attention has been paid in the literature to analyse these alternative projects sprouted after the squares and to untangle their radical imaginaries. This is what this paper intends to do. Invoking and interrogating the Indignant radical imaginaries (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014), this paper sets to go beyond the gap that exists between environmental, political and normative theory on the one hand and empirical studies on the other, contributing to their dialogue. It follows Gibson-Graham and Roelvink's (2010) suggestion 'to adopt the stance of experimental researchers, opening to what can be learned from what is happening on the ground'. It finds that these projects embody three interrelated imaginaries: commons, autonomy and ecologism. Elucidating their meaning and intimate connections, it also sheds lights on connected issues such as the relationships with state and market institutions. The ecologism imaginary, in particular, is linked to an environmental dimension of the squares movements up to now virtually neglected in the literature (see also Asara 2016) which mostly focused on grievances linked to redistribution, 'real democracy', and struggles against austerity and neoliberal governance and the commodification of public space (Tejerina et al. 2013). This paper argues that conceiving of environmentalism as intertwined with wider socio-political issues allows to better understand 'socio-environmental movements' (Asara 2016, Forno and Hayes, this issue) characterised by a 'politics of intersectionality linking a variety of problems that have not been deemed properly "environmental" by the mainstream movement' (Di Chiro 2008, p.286). This type of environmentalism is closely tied with everyday life and embedded in alternative institutions of production and reproduction (Forno and Graziano 2014, Schlosberg and Coles 2016).

The paper proceeds as follows. The following section elaborates the concept of imaginaries by drawing on political theory, social movement studies and political ecology literatures, and explains the methodology of this work. After describing the case studies, Section 4 untangles the indignant radical imaginaries. The paper concludes with some reflections over socio-environmental movements.

2. The (radical) imagination and imaginaries

Speculations on the concepts of imagination have ancient roots, but in the last half of a century this 'paradigm-in-the-making' was able to progress in a way to constitute a proper field (Adams et al. 2015). The concept of imaginaries highlights the ways of understanding and giving meaning to the social world, enabling the (re)production of social institutions, practices and social change (Adams et al. 2015, Gaonkar 2002). The imaginary concept in most treatments

differs from the concept of imagination, which pertains to the psyche or individual human being, or in some treatments amounts to the very capacity of social movements to imagine (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014).

One of the most theoretically developed account of the concept of the imaginary was formulated by Cornelius Castoriadis, who conferred to it the role of founding pillar of his ontology of creation. The imaginary for him is at the same time the capacity to take distance from reality and create the non-real, that is to create reality endowed with meaning. It is what binds together a society, and produces society's historical change (Castoriadis, 1975). The two dimensions of the social-historical field (i.e. the human field), doing and representing, originate from this imaginative capacity, and they are both imaginative creations (Castoriadis 1997). The *radical imagination* of the singular human being – 'radical' because it creates *ex-nihilo* representations, affects and intentions (Castoriadis 1994) - is '*embodied* and corporeal', because doing always implies the imagination of the not yet, which doing can actualise (Castoriadis 2007). The *social imaginary* of the social-historical field is an 'instituting doing' (Castoriadis 2007, p.152), as it creates social imaginary significations and institutions embodying them, and together with the radical imagination it constitutes the *radical imaginary*, which defines society's identity, articulation, needs, values and desires. Society is self-creation or self-institution, i.e. the emergence of a new ontological form. The 'enslavement of men to their imaginary creations' typical of heteronomous societies can be questioned and eventually crippled through contestation and opposition within society itself by groups of individuals critiquing the instituted society (Castoriadis 1975, p.234). Creating a critical distance between the instituted society and the horizon of potential otherness is the precondition for reshaping the instituted society and social imaginary significations (Carlisle 2017), and it amounts to what Castoriadis calls the germ of autonomy.

While for Castoriadis the radical imaginary constitutes the core of his ontology of creation, for Charles Taylor (2004) the social imaginary refers to the ways people imagine and live their social existence, and build expectations underlain by deeper normative notions. But in a compatible way to Castoriadis, the gradual process of transformation of social imaginaries through the infiltration of new practices developed among certain strata of society can for him explain social change (i.e. 'the long march' towards modernity). Increasingly integrated into ordinary people's everyday life due to mass migration and mass mediation, the imagination for Appadurai (1996) is 'an organized field of social practices' holding 'a projective sense', which can turn into a fuel for action (ibid, p.7).

However important are the aforementioned contributions for conceiving of imaginaries as tight to our understanding and transformation of the world, and for the role attributed to groups of individuals (such as social movements) for societal change, they do not help us understand *how* alternative imaginaries are produced locally in social movements *milieux*. From a feminist standpoint theory perspective, Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis (2002) forge the concept of 'situated imagination' as an intrinsically social faculty, that is immersed in practices and (corporeal) experiences of groups, communities or classes of individuals relating to each other in various ways, and at the same time giving our experiences their particular meanings. Developing in the tensions between what is and what ought to be, it is itself involved in the construction of the situated subject, both individual and collective. Their approach inspires, among many, the recent important elaborations by Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish on the 'radical' or 'political' imagination animating social movements, whose emergence and type is shaped by individuals' grounded experiences, realities, political struggles, and needs (Khasnabish 2008,

p.178, 180). Defined as the ability to imagine the world, life and social institutions not as they currently exist but as that which might be brought into being (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014, Khasnabish 2008, p.153), the radical imagination is situated in place(s) and emerges from the process of building alternatives and 'acting otherwise' in alternative spaces of social reproduction, spheres of values and social cooperation, from community gardens and the occupied squares to educational collectives and community economies (Haiven, 2014, Khasnabish 2008, p.157). The radical imagination is a collective, transversal process of bridging multiple imaginations to forge common imaginaries, reshaping subjectivity and everyday life. While the imagination is sometimes explicitly theorised and reflected upon in social movements through for example discussions about strategy and visions or expressed in written form in manifestos or guiding principles, most of the times it appears in the form of unspoken assumptions and it can only be implicitly deciphered by observing and/or participating to their acting otherwise (Haiven 2014, p.247-8, Haiven and Khasnabish 2014).

Indeed, in Social Movement Studies and political ecology, movements' imagination has been investigated mostly through ethnography and in-depth interviews. The processes of emergence of alternative imaginaries are varied, including emplaced experience or resistance, collective memory and the diffusion of experience (Pride Brown 2016, Centemeri in press, Peet and Watts 1996), the intersection of different maps of grievances (Featherstone 2003), the work of activists connecting the grassroots scale with the international one (Routledge et al. 2006), and the appropriation of digital technologies and social media (Markham 2014). Imaginaries are sites of contestation with hegemonic visions (Peet and Watts 1996) but at the same time, being power-laden, they can display ambivalent features (Harris 2014), like harbouring conflicting imaginaries and hegemonic discourses (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014, McGregor 2004, Argüelles et al. 2017).

Most of these latter empirical studies nevertheless do not always conceive of imaginaries as embodied in movements' social practices, and often relegate the concept of imaginaries to the status of cognitive schemata, thence reducing one important heuristic potential and distinctiveness of the imaginary concept which sets it apart from other concepts such as frames, values, principles or ideologies. Following the aforementioned perspectives of authors from Castoriadis to feminist standpoint theory and Haiven and Khasnabish' work, through an embedded case study on the Barcelona movement, this paper analyses the Indignados' movement situated radical imaginaries as *both* embodied and actualised in their social practices and further envisioned into the future, collectively forged through their emplaced 'acting otherwise' in the Indignant alternative spaces of social reproduction and further orienting their 'instituting doing'. More particularly, it focuses on three emblematic indignant projects created during the movement's decentralization to the neighbourhoods, a phase in which the movement devoted itself to 'the creation of alternatives' (Asara 2016, Asara and Kallis forthcoming): a self-managed project on an appropriated vacant lot (Recreant Cruilles), a cooperative centre (Ateneu La Base), and a self-managed ex-factory (Can Batlló).¹ These alternative projects are some of the social arenas nourishing and embedding the Indignant imagination, while intermingling with other movements' imaginations (Nelson 2003). The projects' common imaginaries have been deciphered through an analysis of the material practices, discourses and unspoken assumptions of these three Indignant place-based projects, as well as their self-reflection and 'everyday research' (undertaken by collectives such as *La Ciutat Invisible*, see below). The research is anchored on ethnographic work in the city of Barcelona since the start of the occupation of Plaça Catalunya in May 2011 for the following three years, spending more

¹ The square encampment period has been analysed in a different paper (Asara and Kallis, forthcoming).

than 600 hours as participant observer in the square, and in the later projects, events, and many assemblies during the decentralization of the movement to the city's neighbourhoods. 29 in-depth interviews and 2 focus groups were conducted with activists involved in these projects, while other 45 in-depth interviews and 4 focus groups carried out with Indignados activists since the square occupation provided the necessary background information for this research project (see Annex 1). Interviews with the projects' participants focused on the origins of the projects, how and why activists became involved, and why they do what they do, and their transformational visions. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed through a thematic analysis methodology (Ritchie and Lewis 2003).

In the next section I describe the three Indignant place-based projects.

3. The Indignant projects

3.1. Ateneu Cooperatiu La Base

Ateneu Cooperatiu La Base (LB) is an umbrella project hosting nine different projects in a rented building, and including more than 150 members (Figure 1), ideationally emerged in autumn 2012 out of the *Indignados'* assembly of the *Poble Sec* neighbourhood. The project was born to respond to three space needs: for a gathering/social space, for self-employment as part of a broader vision towards a self-managed economic infrastructure, and for the organization of political actions. Inaugurated in January 2014 in a collectively renovated rented building, projects and participants share not only common objectives and guiding principles (community, autonomy, equity, solidarity and permaculture), but also a common fund, reinvested in non-remunerative activities. The nine sub-projects include: a 40 family consumers' cooperative; a communitarian canteen; a bar (all using food supplied by a local organic farmer); a collective providing social support to female migrants; a catering cooperative; an IT collective offering free internet access and formation courses; a 3,000-book library; a co-maternity and shared nursing group including 30 families committed to free education principles; and the 'Crafts Ateneu', providing training and services on carpentry, blacksmith's, construction and electrician's works. La Base has a rich weekly agenda of socio-cultural and political activities, and the space is also used by many other collectives not belonging to the core project.

[Figure 1 near here]

The group, while diverse in terms of activism backgrounds, is ideologically bound together through the guiding principles and through the overarching concept of 'cooperativism', meaning not only a form of ownership and work organization but values such as solidarity, mutual support, and direct participation of all in a common project. Its transformational vision is anchored in the concept of 'cooperative neighbourhood', a solidarity economy infrastructure where neighbours self-organize and cooperate to give solutions to their vital needs, without individual appropriation of common resources, gradually constituting a political counterpower in the neighbourhood and the city (Córdoba-Mendiola and Dalmau 2013). LB also reclaims the legacy of the Catalan tradition of workers associationism from the mid-nineteenth century up until the Civil War, more particularly of *Ateneus Populars* as crucial cultural and political centres for the working classes, and of mutualistic consumers' cooperatives as institutions capable to partly satisfy workers' necessities autonomously from the market.

3.2. Recreant Cruïlles

Recreant Cruïlles (RC) is a self-managed project of a previously vacant 5500 square metre urban lot, operating under a cession of use scheme of the 'Empty Spaces Program' (ESP) municipality framework (Figure 2). Born out of the Indignant assembly of *Esquerra de l'Eixample* neighbourhood, RC started its assemblies already in October 2011, a year before the ESP call was released, with the aim of self-managing a disused public property (originally contemplating the possibility of squatting). Following the failure of the municipality to adhere to its commitments to build public facilities in the lot (including public housing and two schools), RC was created with the aim to both build a green public and cultural space in the lot, and to arouse a general social momentum for the swift construction of those facilities. According to the core RC group, most of those planned public facilities should have been built in other empty buildings in the neighbourhood, avoiding the construction of some facilities anew, and following participatory planning criteria. To reach those two goals, first, the RC group organized public events and participatory seminars open to the wider citizenry (involving diverse actors from the Association of Students' Parents to environmental groups) to decide what kind of projects could be implemented. Second, it strengthened its collaboration with the Neighbourhood Association – the associations are a result of the struggles of the neighbourhood movement during the Francoist and transition periods, see Castells (1983) – and joined it in order to be able to apply for the ESP call which required juridical standing.

[Figure 2 near here]

Although the space concerned by the call was only 580 square metres, a 'Trojan horse effect' (I75) was envisioned to later appropriate the whole lot. Following the successful awarding of the space, since January 2014 the RC project is implemented, with the set-up of a permaculture community garden and spaces for cultural and social activities. The project is envisaged as a catalyst for broader needed planning changes in what is perceived as an 'alienated neighbourhood' (I73), including pedestrianization and the creation of the first square in the neighbourhood. These changes are officially pushed forward through the Public Space Committee, integrated within the 'Urbanism Committee' of the Neighbours Association. The permaculture garden, the monthly 'Market of the Agro-ecological Peasants' illegally occupying the streets adjacent to the lot, the claim for a participatory process over the construction of the public facilities, and the pedestrianization efforts are some of the manifestations of the imagination of 'a different model of a city' (I69).

3.3. Can Batlló

Can Batlló (CB) is a self-managed umbrella project involving about 300 active participants and tens of projects, and takes its name from and is located in a 14-ha former textile factory dating back to 1878 (Figure 3). It differs from the previous two cases not only in terms of its wider dimension but also because it is situated in the trajectory of a 40-year struggle, in which the *Indignados* movement intervened only as an important final boost, contributing to the seizure of the space in June 2011.

Located in the working-class *La Bordeta* neighbourhood (*Sants* district), since 1973 it was claimed for public use in an intense mobilization campaign steered by the *Sants* Social Centre (SSC), leading to the 1976 General Metropolitan Plan (GMP) foreseeing in it a green space and several public facilities. Given the failure to start the implementation of these plans, since 2009 the new platform 'Can Batlló is for the neighborhood' - composed of neighbours, participants

of the neighbourhood movement, a group of architecture students organized as *LaCol* cooperative, activists from the squatting movement, and later Indignados activists – started a mobilization campaign with a public countdown, menacing the occupation of the site, if the works did not start by 11 June 2011. Given the climate of turmoil created by the burst of the Indignados movement since mid-May 2011, a few days before the declared entrance date, the open-ended cession of use of a 1500 square metre industrial unit was granted by the municipality, under the legal umbrella of the Neighbours Association, rendering the occupation unnecessary. Similarly to the RC case, the seizure of the unit was conceived as a ‘Trojan horse’, and indeed CB later expanded to other blocks.

[Figure 3 near here]

Organized in a general assembly and various autonomous committees, CB is responsible for the design and content of the space, and assumes expenses linked to ordinary management, but the costs linked to refurbishment and maintenance of the building (including bills) are covered by the municipality. Also, CB managed to get small teams of previously unemployed specialized workers from the *Sants* district hired for infrastructure works by the Municipal and Catalan Agencies for Employment and Development. Three criteria were established for the validation of projects: 1) their social-economic viability, 2) their transformational potentiality, and 3) their close ties with the surroundings/neighbourhood. Remunerative projects should devote part of their revenue to the common fund - used for non-remunerative projects - while at the same time contributing to the wider CB project in non-remunerative form.

CB expanded both to other blocks, through a collective refurbishment process and modifications of the GMP (pushed by the Strategy and Negotiation Committees), and at the level of projects/content. While the first projects related to the cultural and recreational sphere, later projects increasingly covered spheres such as economy, education, housing, and gardening. The first projects and spaces included a 15,000-book self-managed public library, the Bar, the Auditorium, sports recreational and artistic spaces, and carpentry and infrastructure spaces. Then followed a communitarian urban garden mostly for use of migrants of a nearby Church Association and of a group of disabled people, a food bank, a printing collective, an ecological beer production collective (mostly for the bar’s use), a social movements documentation centre, and spaces for theatre rehearsal and vehicles (self)repair. In progress of construction are the ecological grant-of-use (co-)housing cooperative *La Borda*, comprising about 30 family units using an assembly-based participatory process for architectural design with expertise from *LaCol*, and the social economy breeding ground *Coópolis* for emerging social economy cooperatives. Solar panels are also planned, because ‘the project should tend towards energetic and consumption efficiency, reducing as much as possible the environmental impact’ (Can Batlló 2012, p.12).

Self-management and the autonomy of CB are thought not to be infringed by the use of state resources because, as a participant explained, ‘we accept money only in case it does not imply some conditions that take away some of our freedom’ (I58:765). Given *La Bordeta* neighbourhood’s dearth of public facilities, a core objective of CB is ‘to achieve spaces for the neighbourhood’ (I55:46), advancing on two parallel routes. On the one hand, it demands that the public facilities committed by the municipality since the 1976 GMP, be built –the first healthcare centre of the neighbourhood was recently built. On the other hand, CB is itself providing some of the facilities planned by the GMP - the cultural and young people centre, the housing cooperative, and the park - together with new projects, with the support of the municipality. The urban changes were made by taking into consideration neighbours’ needs

through neighbourhood assemblies and only involved renovation of buildings (not greenfield construction).

Participants share the ‘cooperative neighbourhood’ vision with La Base, and the idea of ‘cooperative urbanism’: horizontally building another model of living, based on cooperative ownership, transversality, and the ‘dissolution of the paralyzing dichotomies between technicians and users’ (I76:119).

4. Indignant radical imaginaries

The below intertwined common imaginaries are signified and embodied in the social practices and ‘acting otherwise’ of the three projects, and orient and underlie their future visions. Their meaning is untangled by bridging empirical findings with normative theory.

4.1. Commons

Countering growing privatization and commodification of urban space, and diminishing publicness for the interests of real estate capital, commons was not only a central imaginary of square occupations (Harvey 2012) but also of Indignant later decentralisations. Commons are a social system within which resources (i.e. the common goods) are shared through commoning, i.e. through forms of cooperation and non-hierarchical participatory social doing ‘motivated by the values of the commons (re)production’ (De Angelis 2017, p.121).

These cases are ‘manifold commons’ (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015) where space embeds multiple uses and activities, and include sub-commons projects, which retain their autonomy while cooperating in and sharing the same broader goals, a relation which De Angelis (2017, p.292) calls ‘symbiosis’. Their commoning includes an incredible amount of communal work in different forms: most of it is unpaid – according to participants’ needs, capacities and tempos - but in CB and LB we can also find self-employment and waged labour. Production, reproduction, consumption and governance (and even living, in Can Batlló) - are integrated and performed into a single organic unit (Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen 1999, Federici 2011, OMB 2014, Bollier 2014), living, working and consuming within the bounds of the space. Their situated imagination is built through their social doing and their ‘acting otherwise’, experimenting for example with ‘cooperative urbanism’. CB 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 neighbourhood to be’ (I65:512).

Decisions over the distribution of surplus is collective, taking into account social and environmental criteria (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013), through assembly processes deciding over the distribution of the produce of the community gardens, the allocation of the common funds - used to finance non-productive activities - and the validation of new projects. Cooperatives, community and solidarity economy initiatives and community supported agriculture are forms of commons that democratize ownership, management, wage setting and surplus distribution (Dardot and Laval 2014), establishing businesses and markets embedded in communities. Putting centre stage social and environmental needs, they politicize the economy, production and consumption (Forno and Graziano 2014, Laville 1998) and attempt to be alternative to capitalistic markets (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013, De Angelis 2017, Bollier 2014).

These projects are not closed, self-reproducing commons, but instead they are conceived as projects for the neighbourhood, and the imaginary of commons is not only embodied and implemented in social practices, but also further projected into the future. They are continuously concerned in establishing ‘commons ecologies’ (De Angelis 2017), that is interrelating their commons with the outside neighbourhood and city commons and environments through porous

boundaries, holding an intentional public openness (Ferreri 2016, Stavrides 2014). As a painting at the entrance door of RC put it, 'this space is yours'. The commons ecologies include the imagination of a different shared inhabitation and urbanism: for example RC strives to actualise new squares and pedestrianized streets by participating to the Urbanism Committee of the Neighbours' Association, and LB leads a neighbourhood campaign against gentrification plans. In CB, a 2013 campaign 'opened' it to the neighbourhood, by destroying a part of the enclosure's walls, 'otherwise it would have been like a ghetto' (I77:610), creating a new pedestrian street passing through the space. Instead of a 'makeshift urbanism' or temporary forms of DIY urbanism (Vasudevan, 2015) these commons, similarly to autonomous geographies (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010) strive to espouse a long-term vision of alternative 'cooperative urbanism', by settling on non-squatted land.

Commons ecologies are also envisioned through the cooperativism concept, with its idea of gradually extending and generalizing self-management to the wider neighbourhood (cooperative neighbourhood) and city ('common city'). Indeed, by pooling resources, integrating the different functions, commons can be conceived as autonomous spaces from which to reclaim control over material, political or cultural aspects of their (re)production, and are hence tightly linked with the second radical imaginary of these projects, autonomy.

4.2. Autonomy

Autonomy is a concept with many trajectories (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006). It has been the defining element of both autonomist Marxism and class-struggle anarchism (Garland 2010) and more in general of movements embracing direct action, and social and environmental justice (Alvarez and Escobar 1992, Chatterton 2005, Esteva and Prakash 1998, Flesher Fominaya 2015; Cattaneo and Martínez López 2014). Several strands of literature have associated autonomy with self-government, self-management, self-determination and self-regulating practices particularly vis-à-vis the state and capitalist social, economic and cultural relations (Katsiaficas 2006, Flesher Fominaya 2015, Castoriadis 1975, Böhm et al. 2010).

These threads can be traced in the three cases, indeed autonomy is 'a site of political struggle over what it could possibly mean in practice' (Böhm et al. 2010, p.27) and multiple meanings and levels of it can coexist within the same movement, given that its imagination is always situated and context dependent (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). In RC autonomy is articulated in a political dimension, as self-management and self-government through assembly decision-making processes, without 'depending on external inputs' (I73) or being conditioned by outside entities including institutional politics and other established powers. This level of autonomy is ensured by maintaining the public, inclusive, and open character of the space, avoiding its appropriation by specific interests, and it is related, according to many, to a 'qualitative leap' that the movement made after the square occupation, 'advancing from protest to proposal and from proposal to action' (I69).

In the other two cases, an additional broader economic dimension also emerges. Autonomy is one of the five key 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'. It is a struggle that involves building a 'local base' (hence the name 'La Base') of a self-managed economic infrastructure through the sharing of resources and knowledge – an imaginary embodied in the existing projects - and gradually extending this infrastructure space- and sector-wise. This 'parallel economy' would allow to self-determine how and what to consume and produce, decreasing the dependence from the state and the market. Likewise, in CB 'the will to generate autonomy' (I58:721) means engendering different economic relations, being 'self-sufficient with respect to the system', that is acquire autonomy towards 'its economic cycle, its

cultural cycle, its invasive determination of how we should live, how we should organize ourselves' (I60:512). This 'autonomy from capital' connotation (Böhm et al. 2010) is connected to the commons imaginary: by attempting to satisfy their conditions of reproduction, commons aim at countering the processes of enclosure and increasingly disentangle life from commodity flows (Caffentzis and Federici 2014).

'Autonomy from capital' is clearly influenced by the autonomous Marxist tradition (Lotringer and Marazzi 1980, Böhm et al. 2010), involving a process of working class self-valorisation through 'a strategy of refusal' including the rejection of work, radical separation from the logics of capital and appropriation of the production process. In LB and CB, collective work, both unpaid and remunerated, is imagined as an important tool for building such an autonomy: as a participant avowed, it is 'the only form of non-capitalist social relation, a social work, for the good of the community, not working for some selfish, chrematistic, monetary interest, but to improve life of everyone, within the frame of class struggle' (I65:454). Through their social doing participants can gradually envisage self-employment even for non-productive activities to ensure that important social projects are not left aside just because they cannot produce income.

Indignant commoning projects resound with 'autonomous geographies' built by Argentina's Movement of Unemployed Workers (Chatterton 2005). Their vision of territorial control grounded onto alternative production and market systems similarly aims to reach means of subsistence and material autonomy, i.e. 'the material reproduction of bodies in terms of food, housing, education, health and care' (De Angelis 2017, p.362). In LB a campaign for the cession of use of a community garden was being led because 'food is one of the basic necessities we have to cover' (I48): 'in order to organize a conflict or a revolution, you have to have a garden, a bakery' (I51:222). Material autonomy entails transforming the scale at which capital operates and the relations actors are embedded in, making them place-bound, to allow greater control over them (De Filippis 2004). Through the development of solidarity economies, activists are '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, p.26).

4.2.1. Commons, autonomy and the State

In the literature, discourses about autonomy and commons often imply a disengagement with the state or an anti-statism discourse (Hardt and Negri 2009, Holloway 2010). Associated with Open Marxism, autonomy from the state involves an attempt to escape state legislation and determination, through 'practical negativity' and the rejection of the possibility of creating social change through the state (Böhm et al. 2010, Holloway 2010, Hardt and Negri 2009). Nevertheless, the Indignant projects resound more with a different emerging perspective. The point is not to avoid the problem of the state (Alcoff and Alcoff 2015, p.230), which 'clearly shapes the politics of autonomy' (Dinerstein 2015, p.25). Autonomous political organizing is a site of struggle (including with the state and capitalist actors) and is always 'contradictory, interstitial and in the making' (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010, p.488). Complete independence from the state or capital cannot be completely fulfilled because autonomy and commons are always entangled with capital and the state (De Angelis 2017, p.101, Böhm et al. 2010). Commons may need the state and the market for their reproduction, and hence should engage in 'constituent practices that try to change them to favour the development of commons', in a way to go beyond attempts to simply survive dispossessions and exclusion (Pithouse 2014, p.i32), while ensuring commons' autonomy (De Angelis 2017, p.312). If the state should play an important role in 'protect[ing] the flow of public goods that underpin the quality of the

common' (Harvey 2012, p.73), the question then becomes: how can the urban commons 'engage with the public, contaminate and transform it?' (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015, p.51).

As mentioned before, different meanings of autonomy coexist within the same movement. Participants of La Base opted for a rented building despite being against the private property regime, because they did not want 'a space dependent on the rhythm of the legal situation of the space' (I49:287). Their situated imagination hence developed a meaning of autonomy where the relational stance towards the state is relatively less important than for RC and especially for CB, which are built on public land. In CB, through participants' situated social practices, a new conceptualization, 'public from the common' was gradually forged: as an activist remarked, 'at times we found ourselves in situations in which we couldn't... until we came to develop this concept' (I61). The question of public services is here posed from the perspective of the commons, without endangering the commons' autonomy, as RC and CB are self-managed and self-determine their activities and projects without interference from the local state. At the economic level, they are autonomous for ordinary, everyday management, but, especially for the CB case, benefit from state resources for infrastructure works and maintenance. An example is the Auditorium of CB, designed by *LaCol* and co-decided by the General Assembly, but financed by the local state. The projects establish a conflictive, not subordinated cooperation with the state, claiming both their autonomy and social rights that failed to materialize (OMB 2014), without an outsourcing of welfare state responsibility and municipal services to civil society (Rosol, 2012). Instead, the commons imaginary contributes to claiming public services, countering privatization trends, and to a redefinition of what is intended with 'public'. For Dardot and Laval (2014:511), 'it has to do with transforming the welfare state administration into institutions of the common'. To quote *La Ciutat Invisible*, a cooperative part of CB: 'how do we re-appropriate the money and resources that we are producing in other spheres?' (La Ciutat Invisible 2014).

The challenges social movements face is indeed connecting 'the struggle over the public with those for the construction of the common so that they reinforce each other' (Caffentzis and Federici 2014, p.i102). 'Public from the commons' as a form of public ownership democratically managed 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, and CB is often contrasted to municipal civic centres - seized by the neighbourhood movement in the 1970s and then ceded to the administration through private enterprises and 'externalizations' (OMB 2014): here 'the organizational structure is hierarchical and you always obey to the interests of the party that is governing' (I65:244).

This new form of public from the common is made possible through an antagonic position and engaged involvement with the neighbourhood, in which cessions of use are the result of a 'deal' made from a position of power, obtained through struggling (De Angelis 2017), blending disruptive and confrontational type of action with a radical politics of autonomy (Martínez 2014).

4.3. Ecologism

The imaginary of ecologism² is intimately tied to the imaginaries of commons – through its foregrounding role of reproduction - and autonomy - in its connotation of material autonomy and territorialisation. The 'socio-natural practices' (Loftus 2012) of these projects unveil the

² The word ecologism is here preferred to environmentalism following Dobson's (1990) important distinction.

environment not as ‘something out there’, nor just as the politicization of the sphere of consumption (political consumerism) - considered insufficient in itself by participants and liable of having been co-opted by ‘green capitalism’ - but as the places and materiality they produce and shape through their living, consuming, producing, working, and community building. Their ecologism is defined as the conditions that enable their social reproduction (Di Chiro 2008) and their collective ‘provisioning’ including social, emotional and physical needs (Langley and Mellor 2002), which have been particularly endangered through ‘regimes of austerity’ (Hayes 2017). For example, the community gardens do not just serve productive purposes of getting agro-ecological food, but pedagogic, consciousness raising and convivial functions (e.g. in the monthly popular paella) (RC), therapeutic uses for disabled people and social integration purposes for migrants (Can Batlló). In RC, green space is produced and pedestrianization is claimed for the ‘the most polluted neighbourhood’ of Barcelona not only for its value of environmental amenity, but for the health of human bodies and of neighbourhood’s environment.

Participants of these cases get involved in collaborative, convivial consumption, from co-housing to second-hand barter markets, to nursing cooperatives and agro-ecological cooperatives. Following Barry (2012) we could think of these projects and their collective social practices as establishing ‘economies of sustainable desire’, reframing (non-consumerist and non-commodified) desire through the enjoyment of experiences and relationships, privileging frugality, mutuality, and celebrations.

Their projects are ‘spaces of deceleration’ displaying an ‘economy of means’ (Tonkiss 2013), and are informed and motivated by ecological dysfunction and waste (Carlsson and Manning 2010): CB carpenters donate their wooden waste to use for the dry toilets of the *Can Masdeu* urban squat; recycled and ecological materials are used as much as possible in daily practices or in refurbishment works; self-repair workshops are organized for bikes and motorbikes; energetic self-sufficiency is being planned or implemented; and a Do-it-Yourself ethic animates their activities; greenfield construction of buildings is avoided for ecological reasons; and some participants hold a degrowth vision (D’Alisa et al. 2015). The reinvention of urbanism puts centre stage environmental public amenities and the ‘ruralisation of the city’ (I66), co-production and co-design of space, and car-free and healthy environments. The participants of these cases reclaim and reinvent work, embracing meaningful, satisfying collective work, done for its own sake which blurs the distinction between work and life (ibid).

Their ecologism is consciously integrated into their principles (La Base), founding pillars (RC) or definitional statutes (Can Batlló). For example, ‘permaculture’ is one of the 5 key principles of La Base, intended as the adjustment to, harmonic connection and integration with nature, ‘as we are part of nature and we want to establish rhythms (...) and a life form able to co-habit with the territory and with life present in this territory’ (I48), overcoming domination relationship over nature. These projects display an ecological conception of territory (Dirlik 1999), linked to material autonomy (the aforementioned campaign for the cession of use of a community garden in LB is a paradigmatic example), where human subsistence activities are re-grounded within the territory (Centemeri 2018). Self-determination of needs through economic self-reliance entails a caring and symbiosis approach towards the environment, as a participant from La Base revealed:

‘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). 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. Instead of 'caring-at-a-distance' (Mason and Whitehead 2012) through ethical trade relationships, here the transformation of everyday life according to the 'principle of cooperation and responsibility towards each other and the earth' (Federici 2011) is undertaken by re-localising, rethinking and re-situating human subsistence and social reproduction as a locus of commoning (Centemeri 2018). Instead of privileging the logic of profit maximisation and economic efficiency, economic decisions focus on meeting needs as locally as possible through alternative calculations of values including ecological and caring rationales, building a material disconnection from a globalised production and market system and circulatory power (North 2010, Sage 2014, Schlosberg and Coles 2016). Their struggle for sustainable livelihoods and ecologism able to meet needs and reframe desire is tightly linked to the other two imaginaries and cannot be properly understood if conceived as isolated or independent from them. Ecologism is closely tied to the commons imaginary through caring relationships allowed by the embedded nature of reproduction and production within the commons and to the (material) autonomy imaginary through its focus on self-reliance and re-territorialization.

5. Conclusion

According to some, environmentalism and environmental movements are failing to contribute to a transformative politics and have even *implausible* transformative potential (Mason 2014, Bluhdorn 2017) because they are unable to 'unhinge the logic which they appear to be challenging' and instead may even represent a 'social resilience to sustained unsustainability' (ibid:57-58). In an interesting article published in this journal, Mason (2014:141) argues that 'environmentalism has taken a backseat, with much activist energy diverted into the UK Uncut and Occupy movements, trade union campaigns, and local justice issues'. The case study of the Indignados, and the approach taken by this paper can constitute a rejoinder to these two arguments. Mason's citation is paradigmatic of the watershed that social movement literature presupposes between environmental and non-environmental movements, and also of the compartmentalized (or single-issue) critique made by many social movements themselves. This paper has breached such a watershed, uncovering a powerful environmentalism within a movement which emerged by putting front stage the denunciation of austerity policies, increasing levels of social inequalities and unemployment, and a 'non real' democracy (Asara, 2016). It has deciphered the Indignados' radical imaginaries - a still relatively under-exploited tool for analysing social movements - incarnated in the projects' materialities and social practices and further envisioned as the not yet to be actualised.

In response to Bluhdorn's (2017) bloom critique, it is argued that a transformative eco-politics can only be *plausible* if it is able to articulate an integrated vision and practice such as the one put forth by the Indignados. Commons, autonomy and ecologism imaginaries are here deeply intertwined, combining struggles for livelihoods and social justice with ecological motivations, autonomy and re-territorialization with a confrontational type of action, alternative models of cohabiting and living with the reinvention of work, democratization of ownership with the organization of an alternative system of needs satisfaction, the struggle over the public with that for the construction of the common through a double-pronged political attack (Harvey 2012). By doing so, the *Indignados* can be hardly depicted as the 'marginalised' who 'self-organize the cost-effective and self-responsible management of their own exclusion' (Bluhdorn,

2017:57). Situating their locus of resistance and struggle simultaneously in different spheres, including the environment, the market/economy, and the state (Asara 2017), their situated imagination re-imagines and acts in all these spheres. Further research is needed to investigate whether and how this integrated vision is shared by other environmental social movements (Forno and Hayes, this issue).

While these projects are rather local, small-scale initiatives, their emergence can have wider transformational potentialities. As authors such as Castoriadis and Taylor highlighted, alternative imaginaries by social movements can eventually infiltrate dominant social imaginaries and in some cases lead to some reshaping of the instituted order. Extending, further developing and nurturing Indignant radical imaginaries in urban environments, these projects contributed to the birth and then victory in the 2015 municipal elections of the new movement-party *Barcelona en Comú* (BeC), itself a political outcome of the *Indignados* movement. The imaginaries, knowledge, and the participants of these projects fed into BeC's participatorily-built-political program, of which more particularly ecologism and the commons were two of the most important threads ('commons' is even in the party's name). Having opened up new conditions of possibility for alternative urban futures through laboratories for radical experimentation (Loftus 2012), Indignant radical imaginaries are now also animating the governmental policies and actions.

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Annex 1: List of Interviews and focus groups³

NUMBER of Interview	AGE group⁴	SEX	GROUP⁵
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	Sarriá-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
42	1	M	Fort Pienc Garden

³ The interviewees' names reported at times in this article when citing interviews' extracts have been changed so as to guarantee anonymity.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 'C.' stands for Committee, and 'A.' stands for Assembly.

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

Annex 2: Figures

Figure 1. A meeting in one of the rooms of La Base. Source: personal photo



Figure 2. An assembly in Recreant Cruilles. Source: personal photo.



Figure 3. Can Batlló. Source: Photograph from the archive of LaCol.



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