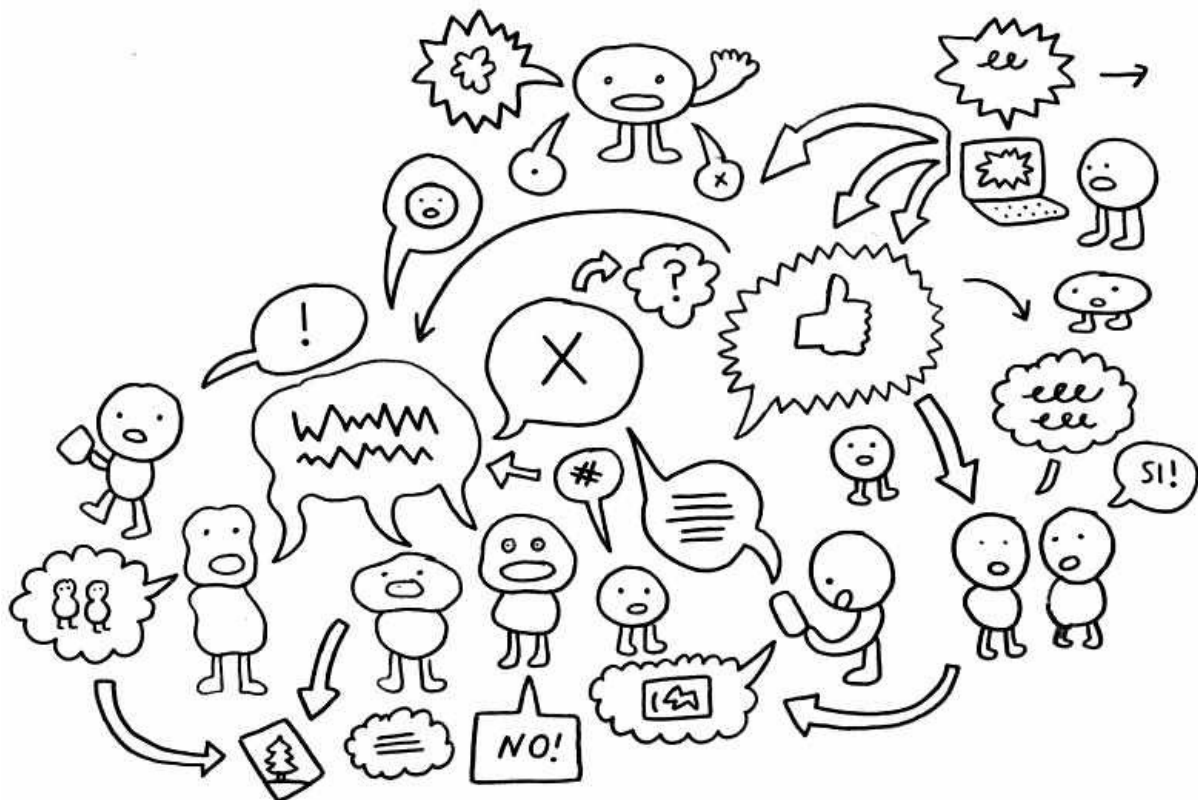


# The Art Sector of Barcelona: Frictions, Concerns and Possibilities for Change

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# Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Defining the project	5
2.1 Research Question	5
2.2 Objectives	5
2.3 Hypothesis	6
2.4 Methodology	7
2.5 Research Plan	8
2.6 Online Tools	10
3. Justification and Contextualization	11
4. Conceptual Framework	12
4.1 Contemporary Art: What Are We Talking About	12
4.2 Barcelona Cultural Policies: History and Current Debates	13
4.3 The Downfall of the Social Democratic Cultural System	14
4.4 Art Professionals and the Creative Class	16
4.5 Art Spaces: What Space Are Important for the Art Sector	18
4.6 Key Neighborhoods and Areas	28
5. Empirical Research	35
5.1 Community Observation: Hangar Production Center	36
5.2 Community Observation: Meetings with the Network of independent art spaces in Barcelona	38
5.2 Passive Role Work Session: GRAF Meeting	39
5.4 Passive Role Work Session February 2017: Roundtable in Fireplace project, “What space does art need?”	37
5.5 Active Role Work Session 1. Meeting with Ariadna Rodriguez, Lara Garcia and Caterina Almirall.	45
5.6 Active Role Work Session 2. First draft of conclusions proposal presentation to participants of research	49
6. Conclusions	51
6.1 Discontent Towards the Situation of the Art Sector in Barcelona	51
6.2 Future Research	55
6.3 Fireplace Art Organization	56
7. Bibliographical References	58

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# 1.Introduction

This research identifies and evaluates the current situation of the art professional and describes guidelines to assess the sectors difficulties. The project uses a participative action research (PAR) and participant observation to have a close contact with the informants. The research also facilitates tools to the participants of the research to find solutions of their own current problems. We work with a specific community of the artistic sector of Barcelona who is discontent with their current situation and believes that it should change. The groups uneasiness is related to the overall economical crisis in Spain, the misunderstanding by the civil society of their practices, un-just cultural policies, the conditions of flexible workers and the historical precariousness of art professionals. The arts sectors problems are directly related to other larger issues such as climate change, migrant conditions and social inequality and they offer creative and critical ideas to address them. The art context can be an important catalyzer for large structural social and economical changes. Mapping-out it's debates and necessities offers tools not only for the artistic community yet also for public representatives or private organizations to make adequate decisions to encourage more sustainable outcomes. Attending the sectors struggles can have an important impact on cities and society as a whole.

## Key Words

*art sector, cultural policy, creative city, community management, social change*



## **2. Defining the Project**

### **2.1 Research Question**

The research question of this project is:

“What are the concerns of the community addressed? A second tier of exploration would be; what solutions can be found to solve the groups concerns?”

### **2.2 Objectives**

The general objectives of this research are extracted from the research and specified into particular objectives.

Our general objectives are:

- a) Identify the concerns of the study groups.
- b) Evaluate and organize the concerns of the study groups.
- c) Compose guidelines to resolve concerns and elaborate further research.

The specific objectives are

- a) Identify research groups.
- b) Carry out participant observation.
- c) Organize encounters and work sessions.
- d) Structure guidelines to address needs identified during research and compose possible changes.

### **2.3 Hypothesis**

The project first had informal conversations with some of the members of the study groups in order to identify what groups would be relevant for the research and what are their disposability to participate. Through these first conversations, social media and other research (Diputació de Barcelona 2013, Marzo 2013) the project determined the following hypothesis.

The hypothesis of the project are:

- The study groups are disappointed with the current situation of the art sector of Barcelona. We presuppose that they are specifically unsatisfied with the cultural policies of the city, the current art market and the general management of public and private large art organizations. The most urgent concerns we assume are related to their economic instability.
- The study groups would like more opportunities to exchange concerns and work together. There are few organized settings for art professionals to converge in order to debate their necessities and concerns in Barcelona. Because we think that the group is discontent with their present state we deduce that there is a willingness by the community to share and find solutions collectively.
- There is a large range of opinions and positions within and among each study group. Due to the diversity of age, moment in personal career and profession (artist, curator, critic, etc..) among the members of the groups selected we have a strong intuition that there is diverging ideas between individuals and groups studied.



## 2.4 Methodology

The project applies two types of methodologies:

- Participant Observations (PO) which consist in learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants (Schensul, Schensul, LeCompte 1999).
- Participative Action Research (PAR) which implies making the research group protagonist and active members of the research (Moreno, Espadas 2002).

Each methodology is applied in different scenarios of the research. PO is used during what we call “Passive Role Sessions” and PAR during “Active Role Sessions”. These two types of sessions differ by the position the researcher has during the session. During the “Passive Role Sessions” the researcher has the same position as any other participant of the session. These “Passive Role Sessions” are organized by an external group to the research. On the other hand the “Active Role Sessions” are organized specifically for the research. In this case the researcher has an active role and orchestrates the session.

ACTIVE ROLE SESSIONS	PASSIVE ROLE SESSIONS
- Researcher as organizer and orchestrator	- Researcher as participant
- Organized by researcher	- Organized by other organization
- Methodology: Participative Action Research	- Methodology: Participant Observation

The project also executed what we will call “Community Observation” which implies a participant observation of existing professional communities or networks. We will now explain the two methodologies applied during the research. In the following chapter we will describe with more detail the research procedures.

### *Previous Research*

Through informal conversations, online research and specialized press we identified what groups would be interesting to approach and invite to take part in the research procedure. We preferred groups already implicated in critical debates about the art field of Barcelona. The project also valued the implication of groups with independent art organization and experimental, socially aware and critical activities.

### *Participatory Action based research*

PAR can be defined as: “ a study and action method that through direct participation from the collectives to be researched on, wishes to obtain reliable and useful results to improve the collective situations. Therefore, researched collectives are no longer “object” of study yet subject or protagonist of the study (pag. 40) (Alberich-Nistal 2008).

In PAR, the distance between researcher and study group is reduced in order to obtain a direct implication, commitment and engagement of informants. Using PAR certain traditional “rules” from other research methods are dissolved in order to obtain another approach.

PAR does not exclude the concept of expert researcher. Yet the position of the researcher becomes more like a facilitator, coordinator or orchestrator of the research. One of the main questions PAR

addresses is *for who* and *for what reason* is the investigation process being produced. The devolution of the results and material generated during the research is therefore shared and returned to the group worked with. The expert also adapts its involvement and learns from the process and the group in which it is involved with. This requires certain capacity of listening and flexibility that is not always easy. Building tools to understand better the participant's reality and taking advantage of the different capacities and knowledge already in use within the community is one of the PAR researcher's role.

The capacity of becoming involved in existing movements and encouraging social change is what PAR is specialized for. The “bottom-up” approach of PAR makes it possible. “A methodological scheme –more or less rigid yet very structured and designed from a top bottom approach by experts- is rarely useful to produce a type of knowledge that pursues to be critical, reflexive, collective, participative and emancipatory. Even more because PAR does not finish only producing knowledge yet intends to confront social realities, transforming them by making the actors the protagonist of the process...” (Moreno, Espadas 2002).

PAR allows researchers to be more connected and “community-linked” than in other more traditional research methods. Its goal of using PAR is to be able to elaborate with the participants of the research tools that can encourage social transformation and not only academic results.

#### *Participant Observation*

Participant observation implies becoming a participant of events, situations and conversations of the study group observed. It differs from Participative Active Research for the participants do not necessarily become part of the procedure of the research itself. Participant observation is similar to PAR for it offers an insiders view of a situation yet the return of the observations and the analysis of these are not necessarily shared and constructed with the study group itself.

### **2.5 Research Plan**

The project has three study procedures:

- Observation of existing communities (Community Observation)
- Passive Work Sessions
- Active Work Sessions

The research procedure is the following:

- 1- Previous Research to identify groups
- 2- Observe communities and “Passive role sessions”
- 3- Organize “Active role sessions”

The project analyses four work sessions and two communities. In total more than 30 professionals and 15 art organizations have been directly involved in the research process.

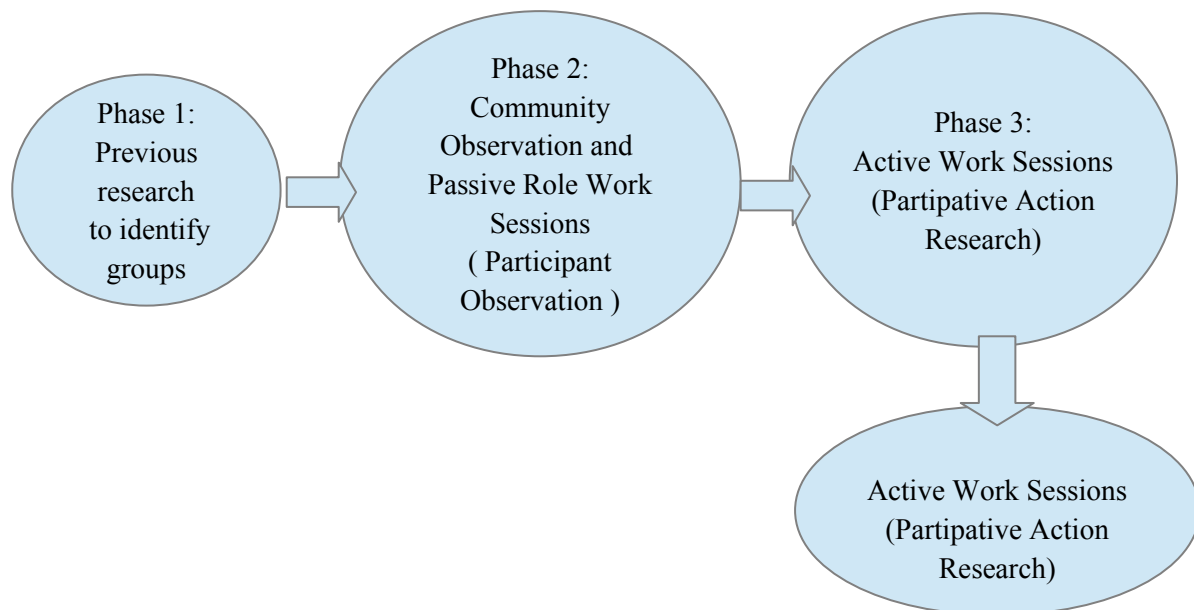
Active Work Session - Work Session 1 - Work Session 2	Passive Work Session - GRAF meeting - FIREPLACE roundtable	Community observation - Hangar Production Center - Network of Independent Art Spaces
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The procedure of Community observation is complex and stretched out through a long period of time. It is composed of small meetings, activities and informal conversations. On the other hand the work sessions had more structured method.

<p><b>Active Work Session</b>  Time 0: Participants arrive  Time 1: Facilitators welcome participants  Time 2: Facilitators open up the debate by putting into discussion different questions  Time 3: Participants and researcher dialogue and debate  Time 4: Research facilitator debriefs the main issues discussed  Time 5: Participants agree (or not) on the summary  Time 6: Farewell</p>	<p><b>Passive Work Session</b>  Time 0: Participants arrive  Time 1: Organizers welcome participants  Time 2: Organizers open up the debate by putting into discussion different questions  Time 3: Participants and researcher dialogue and debate among themselves  Time 4: Farewell</p>
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The project begins with an initial assessment to determine what community observations and passive role work sessions would we assist and execute. During the observations and passive role work sessions ideas are traced and connected to construct the frame for the active role sessions. Then from the first active work session we designated what ideas should be discussed in the second one. This procedure can be repeated until satisfied with the results.

This process gives strength to the project for it has grown out of existing interest of the community. The process of amplifying existing concerns gives social bearing to the project generating links between research and social movements.



## 2.6 Online Tools

The project built a blog to share documents and have an ongoing dialog with the participants of the research. Illustrations were created for the project and shared on social network to activate questions that emerged during the work sessions. This part of the project has been very useful to generate engagement and interest concerning the project. These tools have helped connect issues observed and debated in the different work sessions and communities.

<https://debatsemergents.tumblr.com/>



### 3. Justification and Contextualization

This research offers a special ‘hands on’ approach to the current struggles and emergencies of the artistic sector of Barcelona. A considerable body of research has been produced about the cultural sector of the city (Sánchez-Belando 2016; Sánchez-Belando, Ulldemolins, Zarlenga 2012; Diputació de Barcelona 2013; Marti-Costa / Pradel i Miquel 2012; Rodríguez-Morató 2005; Marzo 2013; Rius, Sánchez-Belando 2015). Yet none of these articles and reports describe the current visual arts context through an immersive and participative fashion such as we hope to provide.

The recent changes in the Barcelona local government, the ongoing impact of the 2015 economic recession and the past public funding cuts make the present situation especially interesting. The present openness of the local government to debate and assess many long going issues of the cultural sector has created a fertile ground for conversations to emerge.

Mapping out the ongoing debates is a tool not only for the artistic community yet also for public representatives or private organizations to make adequate decisions that encourage more sustainable outcomes. Exposing what are the struggles of the artistic community and discern how it maneuvers, innovates and functions, can encourage bottom-up solutions. The project also offers an opportunity for the local art scene to work together, debate and connect. Making visible and connecting these debates can be relevant for other cities and cultural groups to assess similar problems. The questions discussed are not attached to the artistic Barcelona context alone yet to a global tendency in cultural management and cultural policies. Government strategies are often oblivious of what are the necessities or dynamics of the local artistic community (Marti-Costa / Pradel i Miquel 2012). This leads to structures that have little local support or that missed out on the opportunity to build a more stable and vibrant project. In the worst cases some city planning interventions directly go against local art professionals necessities (Peck 2005; Pratt 2015; Novy, Colomb 2013; Markusen 2006). Working in dialog with the local art community should be a guide to many advantages. It may involve more time and investment in understanding and getting in touch with people but in a long run it should increase general benefits in all ways. Being in touch with the local dynamics helps projects be more resilient and adaptable to change. Not to mention the ethical questions that arise around projects designed with no connection with local communities.

The art context is important for it presents critical and creative perspectives on a wide range of topics such as social justice, climate change, community management, gender studies, migrant crisis or working conditions among others. The art context has a tendency to be implicated in local and global social issues and if managed with care can be an important engine for social and economical changes (Markussen 2006). This is why governments and organizations should be attentive to its difficulties and try to assess them. Not to mention that the difficulties found within the art field are directly related to issues outside the art field such as precarious working conditions, public funding cuts or gentrification. In the case of Barcelona, where culture has had a central role in urban planning and city branding we can see numerous examples where the art scene, cultural planning and urban conflicts such as gentrification or turistification are interrelated (Rodríguez-Morató 2005, Delgado 2007). While approaching the problems of art professionals we are also approaching concerns of other sectors of society. Because of this interrelation between the arts and other fields and its capacity to stimulate social transformation we consider crucial this research highly important.

## 4. Conceptual Framework

The concepts elaborated in this chapter have two different functions:

- 1- Guide the reader through some of the ideas later discussed in the empirical research.
- 2- Facilitate the articulation of the dialog with the research participants.

The conceptual framework of the project has been built gradually and in response to the work sessions and observations. We have moved back and forth from describing concepts we found necessary to begin conversations as well as describing new concepts that emerged during the work sessions and observations. We believe that this has allowed us to give more space for the participants of the work sessions to construct the research process according to their own needs. This is an important aspect to point out, for if this process is not done with sufficient care, initial questions and conceptual guidelines can limit and inhibit participants to wander and opionate. The back and forth process of defining the conceptual framework during the various work sessions and observations intended to avoid this problem.

We have therefor focused more on certain aspects than others depending on the ideas developed during work sessions and observations. For example political policies have obtained a central role in the projects conceptual frame even though this was not the initial aim. This indicates the close relationship that public funding has with the participants involved in the project. Other aspects such as the art market did not enter as strongly within the conversations and therefor have very little presence in the description of the conceptual structure.

### 4.1 Contemporary Art: What Are We Talking About

During this research we address what we will define as the contemporary art community of Barcelona. In various situations we will wander into broader definitions of art and culture yet our central focal point is this one. What we will define as contemporary art in Barcelona are mostly practices that are tied to the past traditional field of art such as painting, sculpture, photography and drawing. The practices that the organizations and practitioners we will be talking to and working with are though not necessarily producing any of these types of classic formats. The art field we are talking about is concept oriented and has often little or no apparent relation to the formats we just mentioned. The practices that compose the sector we address are closer to philosophy, anthropology, cultural studies or activism than some of the classic arts. The final product of these practices can be as far ranged as a printed poster, a video, a guided tour, a concert, a workshops, a dinner, etc. These practices often mingle and are diluted into other traditional artistic disciplines such as music, theater, design, film-making, etc. Yet what defines them the most is their high level of experimentation and desire to push the boundaries of traditional narrative, beauty, social-conduct and our understanding of the world around us. Most of these projects and works are shown within the frame of art organizations and galleries. In the context of Barcelona the network of institutions and organizations that are part of this community we describe would be MACBA (Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona), Fundació Miró, Fundació Tàpies, Sala d'Art Jove, Can Felipa Arts Visuals, Sant Andreu Arts Visuals, Hangar, Multiplos, Homesession, Halfhouse, and many others.

During this research though we will generally direct our concerns towards small organizations and individual professionals difficulties. We will focus on the periphery of the contemporary art

community we have described. The majority of the participants and organizations we have worked with and observed are not part of large institutions or do not have a central role in the art context.

#### **4.2 Barcelona Cultural Policies: History and Current Debates**

The history of the art scene of Barcelona has gone through many changes and transformations. Barcelona's industrial history and its relation with Spanish dictatorship during the 20th century has built a particular social and economical context. In deference to Madrid, the configuration and history of the bourgeoisie in Barcelona was very strong and industrious at the dawn of the Spanish industrialization and this explains the emergence of many cultural industry initiatives. Another aspect to take into account is the nationalistic political movement in the beginning of the 20th century and end of 19th century. The Catalan nationalism was promoted to build up the identity through culture (Pareja-Eastaway, Miquel 2015). Until the end of the Civil War Barcelona was much stronger than Madrid and was considered the Cultural Capital of the country. (Rodríguez-Morató 2008). The Barcelona bourgeoisie gave importance to cultural products related to Catalan nationalism. Also the increase of the bourgeoisie and overall population gave place for more leisure time. This led to a rise of cultural industries as well as cultural initiatives. The first Radio station in Spain was in Barcelona as well as the first film studios. After the civil war Franco's dictatorship emphasized culture in a different way. Culture was promoted directly by the government in many cases and was used as a tool to generate consent and a comfort zone to distract from more political or social issues (Marzo 2013).

After the dictatorship we can observe an evolution in cultural policies similar to other parts of Europe. Beginning with a more interventionist approach and elitist or hedonistic vision of culture the local government moved towards an inclusive or anthropological understanding of culture and finally has taken a more economical or entrepreneurial turn (Marzo 2013; Rius, Sánchez-Belando 2013, Rodríguez-Morató 2008). These three models do not always exclude one another and have and often overlap. Rius and Belando describe four moments of the cultural policies of Barcelona after the dictatorship

- a) Recuperation of democracy (1979-1986). Focused majorly on patrimony and a large museum plan for conservation.
- b) Pre-olympic development (1986-1994) Which was done with none or little middle or long term planning.
- c) Promotion of cultural sector (1994-2004). In this period various organizations are built that seem to resemble the "arms length" model from the professionalizing model of cultural democratization (Diputació de Barcelona 2016). Such as the ICUB and the CONCA. An anthropological perspective begins to gain presence during this period as well. Culture becomes clearly a form of nation building yet also as a way of internationalizing the city.
- d) Model in Crisis (2005 -today). Entrepreneurial turn, instrumentalization of culture and oversized events.

The city after the dictatorship slowly moves towards a cultural and touristic model of city for various reasons. After the decline of the industrial economy the local officials saw it difficult to compete with cities like Madrid in other spheres such as financial services or post-industrial businesses. The few sectors that the city perceived it could compete in is the cultural and touristic realm (Morató 2005). This was also reinforced by Barcelona's capacity to gain a leading role within the Catalan government

cultural policies. Somewhat due to its ability to negotiate and dialogue with the Catalan upper class (Rius, Sánchez-Belando 2013, Marzo 2013). The entrepreneurial turn united urbanism and culture to work side by side. The cities historical tradition of entrepreneurship and municipal capacity of organization set a fertile ground for an economically oriented cultural planning. Barcelona's historical lack of central government support had influenced the local industrious culture (Morató 2005). As many other cities competing to be cultural and touristic capitals Barcelona invested in large cultural infrastructures as well as massive events. The infrastructures and festival have been decisive in order to build the Barcelona brand known today. Yet in many ways this strategy had its downfalls.

The large institutions have proven difficult to manage for historical reasons (the traditional lack of regional institutions), for their contextual setting (the political-institutional conflicts) and economical (scarcity of funding) (Rius, Morató, Illa 2012). The complication of negotiating between local and regional governments have affected negatively many cultural policies making projects have short durability, difficult governability or incoherent plans (Rius, Morató, Illa 2012; Marzo 2013, Diputació de Barcelona 2017). This has been the result of political conflict due to the leadership of opposing parties of each government (Regional and City government). Yet also for the exceeding competitiveness between cities and governments to have similar infrastructure and projects (Diputació de Barcelona 2017). Generating a lack of collaboration between municipalities has hurt the cultural context deeply.

During the last two periods of cultural policies, Barcelona has invested in making urban cultural clusters and focused on the urban development outcomes of cultural project. The Museum of Contemporary art of Barcelona (MACBA) and the Center of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona (CCCB) were built in the center of the old city as part of an urban plan to revitalize the area. The 22@ of the Poblenou district is another case that has been studied (Marti-Costa, Miquel 2012). Many of the cities cultural plans have been criticized for being misleading and hypocritical. The mega event of the Forum de la Culturas has become a classic example (Espai en blanc 2004). The instrumentalization of culture has often created gaps between the local social actors (Rius, Sánchez-Belando 2015). Not to mention the sometimes obvious contradictions between participative and socially engaged culture and the entrepreneur model (Blakeley 2005). This gap has led to failures and resistance from local groups and led to interesting alternative models such as Can Batlló or Nou Barris (Sánchez-Belando 2015; García, Eizaguirre, Pradel 2015). Projects have been growing that encompass the concept of Social Innovation as an alternative to the public policies and market economy of the city.

The current government is still struggling to cope with the inherent errors of the previous governments. In 2015 the new political party that gained power of the local government (BCN en Comú) claimed that it will reduce the negative effects of tourism on the city. It is still early to detect lasting effects of these policy changes. They also propose changes in the cultural policies of the city. We will mention again this aspect when describing the relation between independent art spaces and the city government.

### **4.3 The Downfall of the Social Democratic Cultural System**

Cities cultural models around the world have been going through an entrepreneurial shift and have incorporated the importance of the economic side of cultural planning. Both the traditional social-democratic model of the welfare state as well as the centralized cultural planning model have gone



through various transformations throughout the majority of European cities (Zimmer and Toepler 1996) as well as in Barcelona. The turn towards the notion of creative industries is extensive and very present in the majority of urban areas. In this paragraph we will approach various critical perspectives of the entrepreneurial turn. We will trace the history of certain transformations with the help of various authors who have done so extensively.



*Illustration by Quim Packard*

The initial critics towards conservative cultural policies by leftist movements gave room for the creative industry model to arise. Socially aware movements were very active in the 70's in signaling elitist, exclusive and discriminatory government cultural plans. These critiques were then easily instrumentalized to promote the creative industry model that claimed to be more inclusive and less government dependent (Rowan 2014). The creative industry model was also adopted as a strategy by various cultural organizations and public departments to protect cultural budgets from aggressive funding cuts promoted by right-wing governments (Morató 2005). For various reasons we find a rise of a new relation between culture and economy that emerges throughout Europe and the rest of the world during the 80's and 90's (Harvey 2001). A very visible threshold is when Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan implement their neoliberal tactics against the "big government". But it was not until the 90's that the star terms were coined. In Australia the report "Creative Nation: Commonwealth and cultural policy" was one of the first to use the term Creativity instead of Art or Culture. Tony Blair's government in 1997 openly changed the use of the cultural sector to creative industries which is also an important landmark in the history of the rise of the creative fever. Due to the debilitated notion of welfare government right wing ideology was easily able to wedge new notions of culture in a convincing fashion. Inviting more actors to the decision table of cultural policies and broadening the limits of what is culture and art was precisely what the leftist critiques demanded. Though the creative industry offered this change by welcoming business at the table and not necessarily grass-roots movements. Along with this new marriage between economy and culture a new focus towards local and municipal planning appeared. Culture became a tool for economic growth and city branding.

The social democratic models that had gained strength since the 60's slowly lost terrain. The continental or central European model of cultural policies of countries such as Switzerland and Germany (Zimmer, Toepler 1996) had tried to address problematics inherited by the earlier conservative and centralized prototypes of cultural policies. The conservative model based on the notion of "cultural democratization" charged with aristocratic ideals had been substituted in certain countries for more social-democratic paradigms. A broader notion of culture was being embraced and the existing ideas of patrimony and excellence were being questioned. Yet this model has been repeatedly replaced by the entrepreneurial model mentioned before.

The creative boom has been growing for almost three decades now and many flaws have been pinpointed from various angles. From various perspectives the creative city has been criticized: gender discrimination (Gill 2002,2007), Inequality (Oakley 2004, 2006), professional exploitation (Bank and Milestne 2011) and social exclusiveness (Harvey 2005). Studies even indicate from an economic stand that it does not guaranty economic growth (Freeman 2007). All these studies show how the application of certain models overly directed by economic drives and disconnected with social issues of cities are misleading and can be directly harmful to the general society. Making more hybrid models and constructing more complex plans has been many cities concern in recent years. Yet the creative industry perspective is still present and running and needs urgent reconfigurations or barriers. As Rowan (Rowan 2007) puts it "few get a piece of the cake in the creative city and what some called gentrification (Glass 1955, Jacobs 1993) others call Creative Class".

#### **4.4 Art professionals and the creative class**

"Not in our name" was a campaign by artist and cultural workers who opposed the branding campaign of the city of Hamburg in 2005. The organization was opposing a creative city branding plan. There are various reasons why art professionals have opposed or are simply not convinced by the creative city ideal. We will describe three reasons that have emerged in different city context.

*Art professionals have social concerns that do not align with the objectives and externalities caused by the creative city model*

"If the creative city is an arena for contentious politics over the character of the city and for whom it works. It is difficult to imagine bankers, lawyers, nuclear scientist and artist (all members of Richard Florida's creative class) all on the same side". (Markusen 2006)

The fuzziness of the concept of the creative industry, creative class, creative city can generate mistrust. Artist tend to vote "left" and have progressive ideals. They believe art should help promote a more just, equitable and sustainable social and physical environment. Many artist are directly involved in activist movements or community based projects. They also generally will defend minimum wage, well funded public education, universal health care and social safety nets. The creative city model has often been proven to encourage the opposite and create movements of opposition by artist themselves (Markusen 2006; Novy, Colomb 2013; d'Ovidio, Rodríguez-Morató 2017).



Illustration by Quim Packard

*Creative city promotes precarious work conditions*

Creative industry policies and models have not given enough attention to the quality of the work life it generates. Creative jobs are expected to deliver a surplus of pleasure and satisfaction. Yet what is less proven is if these activities can support a productive economy with an engine of sustainable jobs at its core (Ross 2008). A heavy sacrificial cost is related to creative model job system (Gill 2002, 2007; Huws 2003; Perons 2003; Reidl et al. 2006; Ross 2002). The creative worker relies on impossible degrees of enthusiasm and willingness to self-exploit, and little possibility of real job security. Self-exploitation becomes the cost for having the gift of autonomy and dispensability for flexibility (Menger 1999). These conditions are not only part of the creative sector yet have become common in many other occupations. Governments and firms have withdrawn from their obligations and have not found solutions to avoid the installment of a very damaging work system. Even if many of the terms and characteristics of these work models have in part originated within creative sectors it is now a cross-class and cross-occupation problem (Ross 2008). This term is named Flexploitation. The new precariat is compared to historical exploited members of society. The problem though is more difficult to tackle for it needs a cross class coalition. We find that teachers, janitors, web-designers and artist are often in similar working conditions due to the expanding global market model. Neoliberal economics have found ways transform precarious working condition into something apparently cool. The creative city system strengthens this imaginary and rarely addresses the real problems of working conditions (d'Ovidio, Rodríguez-Morató 2017)



Illustration by Quim Packard

*The Creative city promotes a type of artistic system different from what art professionals want*

Even though the cultural sector may find the entrepreneurial turn in culture interesting for it gives them a new public legitimacy the results of this shift is not clear it will favor them. Art professionals tend to prefer a mosaic like neighborhood based network of cultural institutions over centralized large institutions in their city (Markussen 2006). A more diverse and decentralized metabolism has a tendency to promote more local artist. Large venues on the other hand hire mostly well known international artist. City branding policies prefer to invest in large new institutions and spectacular festivals leaving small organization underfunded. Small organizations or artist centered initiatives have often edgier and experimental proposals and might not be as easy to brand. Critical and experimental projects can go below the radar of public funding or even consciously excluded when cultural planning gets aggressive (Marzo 2013). The knowledge about creative city in local governments hands is often only used to promote window dressing for tourism marketing and downtown development strategies. The primary impact is land value and rent and not the transmission of the ideas originated by the creative workers (Harvey 2001). This drift is the central problem of the relation between art workers and the creative city model.

#### **4.5 Art Spaces: What Space Are Important for the Art Sector**

Spaces are important to understand how art networks functions within a specific city. Small art center, residencies and studios are key elements within a community for it to thrive (Markussen 2006). Pascal Gielen in his article “The Artistic Biotope and its Institutional Securities” (Gielen 2009) describes a diagram composed of four domains that are necessary for artist to have a sustainable career. The domestic, peer, market and civil domain. Without a balance of all four domains according to Gielen artist tend not to survive for long. Here we will focus on spaces in relation to these domains. Crossing the studies about spaces with Gielen’s biotope theory we can underline even more their importance as well as identifying in more detail what these spaces actually offer. Pinpointing what these spaces add to the artistic ecosystem of Barcelona can encourage seeing beyond the simple infrastructure and help imagine new models that sustain the dynamics of the professional community.

Another categorization we will imply are the distinction of the Underground, Midleground and Upperground (Cohendet, Grandadam, Simon 2010). These three circles can be understood as three gradients of the connection between the peer biotope and the commercial biotope. From less connectivity to more connectivity. Or as we will later call level of exposure. All three are important in different stages of projects and individuals careers. In this chapter we wish to stress the importance of the underground as an essential environment for artistic sectors. We see during our empirical research in numerous cases that it is often overlooked and/or underfunded. Applying these categorical tools to analyze physical spaces we can also achieve interesting results.

We will first describe three types of spaces that are important for artistic contexts. Each of these have a tendency to be situated more in one biotope or another. At the same time we can categorize specific spaces and organizations with the circles of Underground, Middleground and Upperground according to their relation with the market or the peer to peer or emerging environments. At the end of this chapter we will categorize various art organizations that have participated in the research.

In the Figure below from Cohendet, Gandadam and Simon article "*The Anatomy of the Creative City*" (Cohendet, Grandadam, Simon 2010) we can understand how these three circles interact with each other and what are their roles within the circuit.

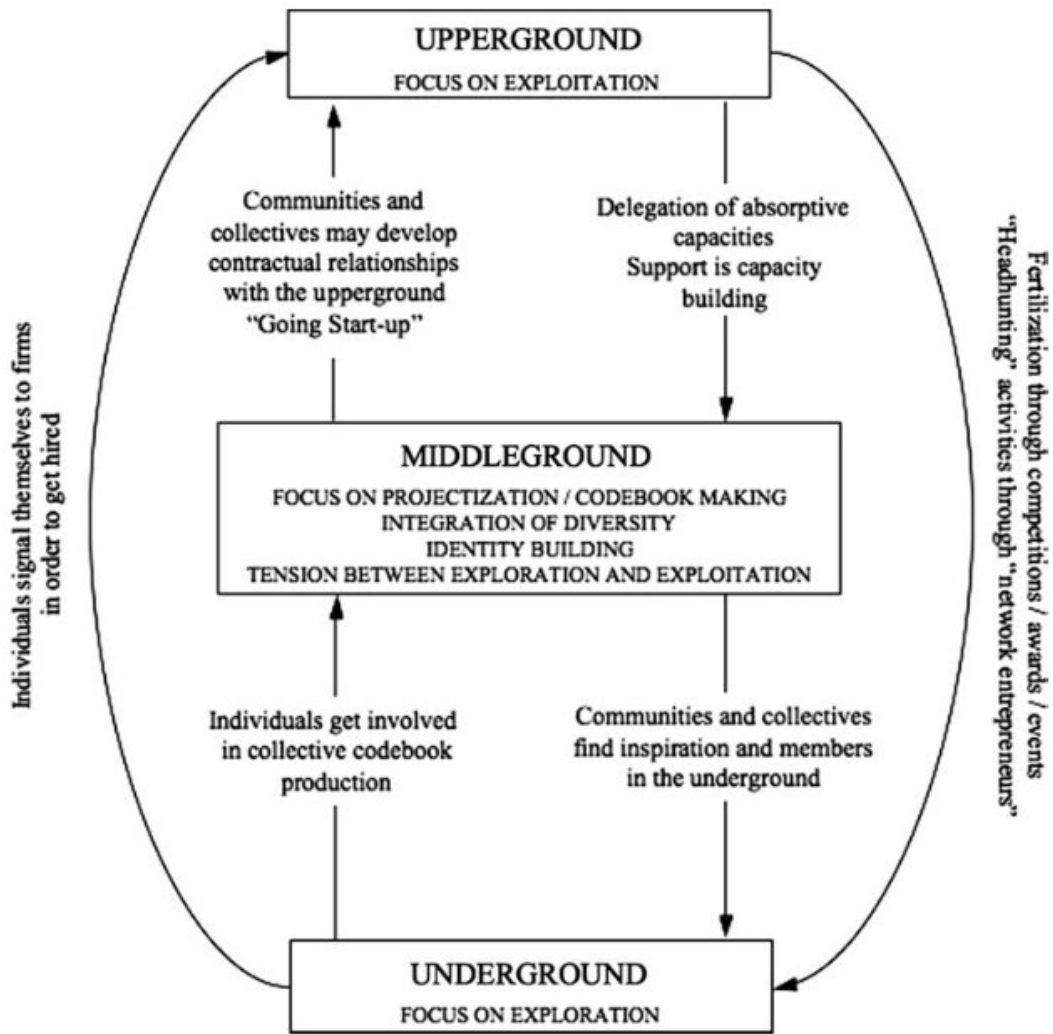


Figure.1 Cohendet, P., Grandadam, D., & Simon, L. (2010). Figure of the anatomy of the creative city.

<b>DOMESTIC</b> respect relations ritual behaviour own time intuition/self-reflection	<b>PEERS</b> evaluative relations praxis social time knowledge reflection
<b>MARKET</b> competitive relations quantifying behaviour rationalized time calculated value	<b>CIVIL</b> public relations representative behaviour embedded time public recognition

Figure.2 Gielen, P. (2009) *Figure the Artistic Biotope and its Institutional Securities.*

### *Workspaces*

To define “workspaces” in the art field we must also address the concept of work. For a contemporary artist visiting a waste disposal site, talking to their parents, flying in a plane, melting plastic or assisting an opening can all be part of their work process. The difficulty of designing infrastructures and organizations that can give support for the wide range of activities that today’s artist do is challenging. The classic studio infrastructure is becoming more and more obsolete in many ways. In Barcelona we still find many studio spaces yet they often serve as a symbolic space to store work or to meet with peers and curators and not so much for the daily production of art works. For artist to have a studio gives them a sense of responsibility towards their practice and offers a space to concentrate on their work.

Curator and critics on the other hand have more task related to office work. They may choose to work at home or in a café instead of renting a specific desk space to do their job. Workspace can be part of both the domestic and the peer domain according to Gielen (Gielen 2007). It can be a space for concentration, solitude and private conversations as well as a place to share ideas with colleagues. Workspaces can have more or less connected with the market or civil domain as well depending on its dynamics or the artist use of the space. Some large studio spaces with many artist become important connection points between the upperground and the underground. Curators and gallerists can become frequent visitors of studio spaces making important links between the domestic sphere and exhibition opportunities.

Yet artist, curators and art critics all are increasingly being forced to travel more and spend relatively long periods of time away from home for work (residencies, seminars, exhibitions, etc.). The “foot loose” situation of most art professionals makes it sometime difficult to balance out with having a

fixed desk or studio in one location (Markussen 2009). Even though for some it is still something useful for their work the rising prices of rent in cities like Barcelona are difficult for art professionals to manage. Finding less costly solutions such as working from home or finding available spaces for specific production processes (art centers, other peers studios, etc) is often the solution in order to not assume the high cost of a fixed rent. All these different aspects are challenging institutions, art professionals and cultural planners to find solutions to the current situation of the field. New models are needed to address the growing difficulties. Studios and offices might no longer be crucial or affordable for art professionals today.

### *Exhibition spaces*

Exhibitions spaces have evolved and changed throughout history in substantial ways but their primary objective is to show the work of artist. The exhibition space would most commonly enter what Gielen calls the civil biotope (Gielen 2015). *“The word ‘exposition’ comes from the Latin expositio, meaning ‘to give an explanation’ or ‘to make a statement’ in public (Bal, 2006)”* Gielen explains. The exhibition space is not only a space yet a complex symbolic environment that represents the overlapping of the peer and domestic domain with the public sphere. This overlapping can be organized and articulated in many ways beyond the historical placement of objects in an empty space. How the exhibition moment wishes to be constructed is connected to a large number of ideological, economic and cultural aspects.

The characteristics of a the exhibition space varies depending on factors. In the 1940’s the white cube model became predominant. The white cube consist in a white room with the least amount of ornaments possible with a general lighting. Before the White Cube we found mostly the salon style space. The salon resembled more a living room, with focal lights on each art works and sometimes ornamented walls, doors, etc. The walls were rarely white and the floor could also have ornamented designs. Yet as the types of art works and art production changed so has the exhibition spaces. Today work can be exhibited in books, in subways, in squares, markets, streets, forests, warehouses,... Artist have become every time more engaged with their surrounding and therefore the contained hermetic atmosphere of the classic white cube has become less and less attractive.

Yet even though art has been able to take many forms and work in different environments, the private galleries, art fairs and large institutions still mark a clear tendency towards the classic white cube style. The idea of the white cube is to generate a frame where the work stands as much as possible. The white cube esthetics influences how artist design their work. Even though there are other tendencies, artist often project the exhibition of their works in a white cube setting. Imagining new setting for exhibiting art has been a key element of art management debates especially when concerned with social issues.



WHAT SPACE DOES ART NEED IN BARCELONA?

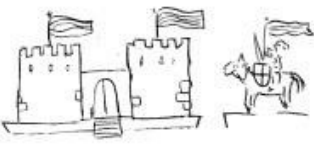






- (A) CASTLE 
- (B) FANCY FANCY 
- (C) CIVIC CENTER 
- (D) ARTIST RUN OR INDEPENDENT SPACE 
- (E) FOREST 
- (F) NO SPECIFIC PLACE 
- (G) ALL OF THE ABOVE 
- (H) NONE OF THE ABOVE 

Illustration by Quim Packard

When the Biennial of Sao Paulo of 2017 decided to move the Biennial to a public square not only did the atmosphere change yet also the art exhibited and the relation with the public. This is an example of how the container makes the contained. These issues are important to point out for they are often misunderstood when architect, policymakers, government officials or urban planners imagine and make decisions on where art should be showed. The history of the exhibition space is directly tied to what we expect or understand as art. Reflecting on how institutions exhibit art can give us clues on what is their hidden agenda.

Small organizations can fall on two side of the debate. Some find the necessity to replicate the white cube in order to maintain the more official and recognizable art setting. On the other hand, we will

find other small organizations who will take advantage of their lack of space and make it their strength. Organizations in Barcelona such as BAR project is an example. BAR has no exhibition space, they find new spaces for each project they show. They have used spaces such as a garage, a private house or a cocktail bar for their venues. In certain ways this might add difficulty to their production process but at the same time it saves them from having to maintain a permanent space. Nyamnyam is another interesting example in this sense. Nyamnyam usually organizes their activities in their own living room generating a more relaxed and informal environment. Both projects take advantage of their situation and create more permeable and accessible atmospheres than those we might find in a classic sterile white gallery.

These examples of unconventional exhibition spaces also lead to unconventional modes of consuming and even making art. Often the distinction between process and final art work becomes unclear. Works can become a type of happening or a mix of many formats and are sometimes completed with the help of the public. Yet even if for the common art consumer these formats have become usual, for the general public or for government officials it might not be the case. Art events/works that are never quite finished and are difficult to explain or photograph can be confusing. Government officials and institutions often need easy to explain projects in order to justify the resources invested in them. These types of projects may be very difficult to communicate outside the art-realm leading large institutions or governments to prefer to invest in types of art that are less edgy but have are attractive for a broader public. Another feature that is important to mention is how these art events are represented through media. The white cube offers a setting that iconically represents an art exhibition that a bar does not. A performance in a bar may simply look like a party when photographed and posted on social media yet is placed in a white cube it is clearly something else. Institutions, artists and even art schools are often struggling in making sure that their activities are easily recognizable as “art” activities. This might jeopardize the quality or the works capacity to explore more experimental formats.

An anecdote that reflects some of these issues is a discussion that occurred in a meeting between the new Cultural commissioner in Barcelona and the Federation of professionals of culture of Catalunya. When the president of the PAAC association of artists of Catalunya asked what was the city's governments plan in visual arts, the new commissioner answered that they are organizing a video mapping festival. Video mapping is a format of art that fits many governments necessities yet maybe not the artistic sectors. It pleases a wide audience, it has a relatively low cost, it can be showed in public areas, it is easily reproduced through photography and is recognizable as art or “artistic”. These are all factors that make it very attractive for political agendas. Video mapping is the contemporary version of fireworks. Even if there are artists who are experimenting with video mapping in innovative matters the usual light show are mere special effects. Not to mention that when projected on historical buildings they are a way of shining a new more dynamic “light” on monuments that represent the city's classical dominant powers (colonialist, capitalist or religious). Rarely do these shows offer critical viewpoints or address social issues.

The adaptability of art professionals to work with different types of spaces offers many possibilities. Yet too much adaptability can also be related to instability and uncertainty. Each space and format presents new challenges and without sufficient support artists cannot always find effective solutions. Site Specific artwork which involves artists creating a work for a specific location each time has very positive outcomes yet it also involves large quantity of research that is not always considered into the

initial costs. Art commissioners and cultural programmers when considering programming outside gallery spaces may not always be aware of the real cost that a process takes.

The complexity of exhibition spaces is directly tied to other issues in the art context. The social role of art, its model of financing, etc. It is important to stress the diversity of exhibition spaces when imagining cultural policies and new strategic plans in a city but also the factors that go with them. Each type of exhibition space is related to certain demands and necessities. Different exhibition locations have different social, economic, ecological and political functions and characteristics. Art organizations, technicians, gallerist, curators, artist and city representatives should be aware of these issues in order to make appropriate decisions. Encouraging organizations to make use of spaces different from the white cube can bring substantial change in how art is viewed, produced and shared yet we must know that this change may result in additional stress or work for artist who are often already in difficult working conditions.

The exhibition spaces are usually the most obvious place for generating connections between the underground or middleground and the upperground. Yet it varies on the characteristics of the institution that host the events that these connections occur more or less often. Of course artist also have an important part to play while creating links with different spheres. Some organizations are more internal workspaces for colleagues and friends to work together and experiment. Other organizations are more directed for a wider range of audience.

*Spaces for reflection, experimentation, connecting, learning and sharing.*

It is important for art professionals to have a space to meet and talk to peers. To talk about their work process, their difficulties, questions and goals. The peer domain is a crucial aspect of the artistic field and without it many artists admit to have difficulties to continue their practice (Gielen 2009). Art schools and universities often serve an important peer to peer environment between students, professors and technicians. This environment is difficult to reproduce and is sometimes lost once outside the educational environment. Artist studios may serve in certain aspects this melting pot, bringing professionals together in the same physical space encourages conversations to arise. Art centers also produce similar interactions through talks, openings, workshops or hallway conversations. For this reason art centers are very important for the artistic ecosystem and can have many larger benefits (Markusen 2009, Jackson 2004, Kirchberg, Kagan 2013). These types of interactions and milieus must be fostered and protected yet sadly enough cultural policies and large institutions overlook these root necessities. The “underground” circles are essential in many fields. We see similar remarks pointed out again in “The Anatomy of the Creative City. *Industry & Innovation*” (Cohendet, Grandadam, Simon 2010). Their study is about Montreal's video game and circus sector.



*Illustration by Quim Packard*

The underground communities are incubators for new ideas and give support to emerging and edgier projects that those we find in more publicly exposed environment. It is necessary to understand that space and opportunities for fruitful encounters, long conversations and ideas to be “bounced” around in are as important as any large public event. This can be also observed in co-working space where encounters and conversations are encouraged (Capdevila 2015). Capdevila observes how innovation is directly related to the amount of collaborations and connections are generated within these work

environments. Spaces that are simple shared spaces that do not encourage collaboration and sharing do relatively little for professionals capacity to innovate and expand their professional horizons. Encouraging or designing fertile ground for cross-action knowledge sharing has positive results in numerous sectors. Even though the results may not immediately apparent we must continue to support these types of spaces and environments.

In a way this research has built this type of opportunity. More than a simple diagnosis or recollection of knowledge we have generated an opening for certain dialogs to occur. Generating connections between art professionals that otherwise might have not taken place. These situations are key for communities to thrive and find collective solutions to shared problems.

Opportunities for connectivity between different communities to happen can also be pivotal for larger scale organization. At a city level encouraging and designing these spaces can make the difference between successful planning or not. In the following chapter we will analyze two neighborhoods in Barcelona where numerous aspects described in earlier paragraphs are related to precise examples and where dialog and proximity were not applied correctly.

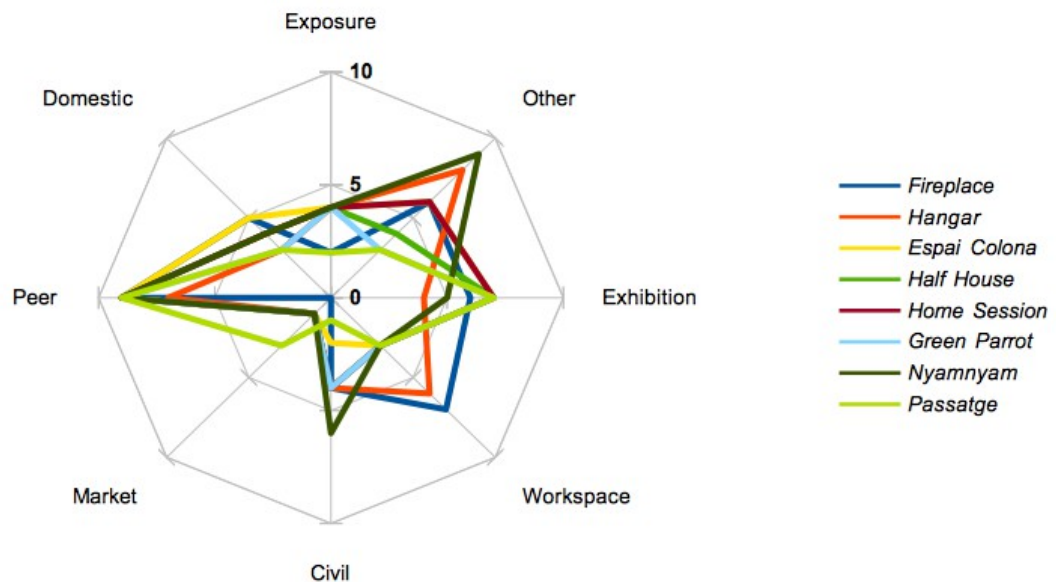


Figure 3. Spaces biotope, exposure and type

In the figure above we have superposed three variables of categorization of art spaces. We have graded each one on a scale of ten. The spaces we chose are all part of the Independent art space Network we have interviewed and made particip of the project except Hangar. We have determined the values corresponding to each variable according to our own knowledge and criteria related to each space. This measurement could be done following more precise criterias yet it could also serve as a tool to evaluate spaces collectively. In this project we would of liked to follow the second approach. In further projects we hope to be able to do so.

The variables represented on the figure are: Gielens Biotopes theory of Domestic, Peer, Market or Civil domains in which spaces can be more or less part of; Cohendet, Grandadam and Simons underground, middleground and upperground classification which we have named “exposure” and

finally we have used our own classification of exhibition, work or other type of space. The “other” typology of space we identify is the one we described above as “*Spaces for reflection, experimentation, connecting, learning and sharing*”.

We can observe a few things in the figure above. First that the Peer domain is predominant with the spaces we have analysed and that the Market domain is clearly unrepresented. On the other hand we can say that the spaces cover all three types of types of use of spaces more or less equally (Exhibition, Work and Other Space). Yet on the exposure axis we observe that the norm tends to be on the lower side. Meaning that these spaces tend to be more in the underground than on the middle or upper ground exposure circle. These observation may not add much to what we would expect of a Network of Independent spaces. Maybe Hangar which is much larger than most of the spaces is what could surprise us the most. Yet it is part of Hangar mission and nature to maintain itself in a closed and more experimental sphere of outreach and exposure. Maintaining so a atmosphere of innovation and peer to peer networks dedicated to their internal practices and research. Yet these general observations of these spaces also shows there possible fragility. Not being active in the civil domain makes them vulnerable to public opinion and therefore to political planning. At the same time there lack of activity in the market domain makes them dependent on personal resources or public funding to function. These two indicators expose the weaknesses that such organizations sustain. This weakness usually goes hand to hand with precarious conditions and can easily produce high levels of competition among organizations at this level. If not managed well organizations of similar status can try to push aside each other in order to gain minimum recognition to obtain public funding. Government representatives may consciously or unconsciously take advantage of this setting to push and persuade in favor of the political agenda of the moment. Solidarity and mutual recognition can be of the few solutions to avoid this type of game. Network such as Xarxaprod or the Federation of Cultural Professionals are key to help solve these type of situations.

At the same time gaining more social recognition is key for organizations to thrive. Large social recognition help governments justify funding to these types of initiatives. Social recognition can also help convince governments that these types of spaces have a social value. Strengthening the market domain of these organizations is not easy. The type of activities they promote are very difficult to sustain in a market economy. Even though many attempts have been made few have prospered. We will continue to address these issues in the chapters that describe the worksessions developed with the members of many of these organizations.

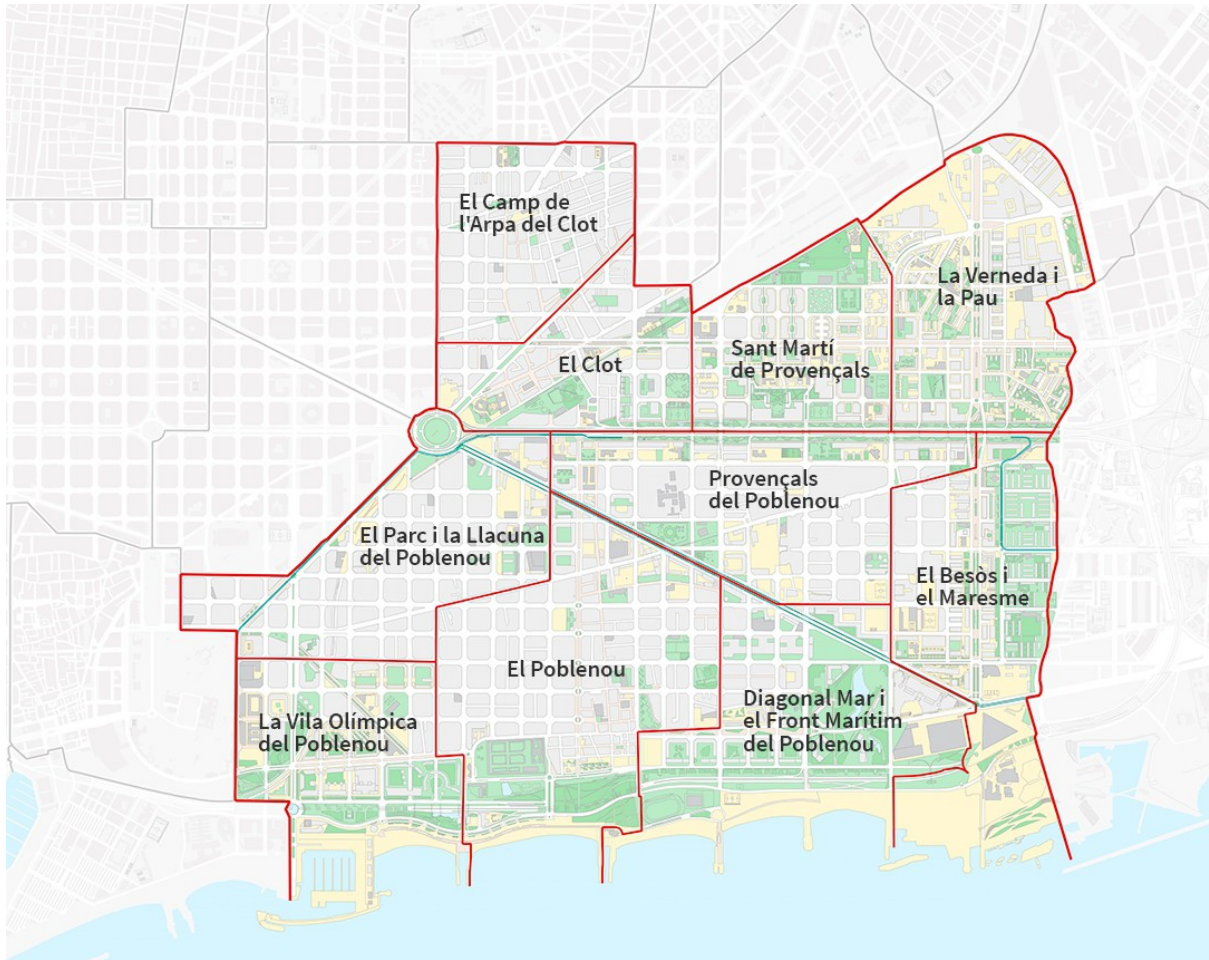
#### **4.6 Key Neighborhoods and Areas**

In order to understand the context in which this study is placed we will describe two neighborhood that have had an important role within the artistic context of Barcelona. By describing the history and scenarios of these two neighborhoods we obtain more insight about how certain interaction among art professionals, government officials, private organizations and civil society are taken place in the city of Barcelona. There are other neighborhoods that we have mentioned earlier such as the Raval that could also be part of this chapter yet we have preferred to center on only two for their differences and concrete relevance for the participants of the research.

### *Poblenou*

Poblenou is an old industrial area that has gone through various changes in the last decades. The area has been intended to be re-converted into a Knowledge and Technology Hub for new businesses by means of a public planning program. Before this public reconversion during the 2000's called 22@, artist and cultural initiatives had been slowly occupying the vacant warehouse and industrial buildings in the vicinities. Hangar one of these projects initiated before the 22@ planing. The 22@ plan transformed and generated important conflicts with neighbors and artist that had moved to the neighborhood before-hand. The demolition of industrial heritage and the increase of pricing caused by the new 22@ plan started changing the ecosystem of the quarter (Marti-Costa, Miquel 2012; Aparici 2012).

After the 1970's Poblenou's industries began moving to other more available and cheap industrial zones outside of Barcelona and abroad. This fleet of industries led to many vacant buildings and a decline of economic growth in the area. With no immediate reconversion or attention by the local government or other businesses the neighborhood fell into visible difficulties, decay and frictions. After laying underground the train tracks separating Poblenou from the beach and the center of Barcelona during the 1992 Olympics the quarter evolved into a new area of interest for urban planners. It wasn't until 22@ that an intentional organized change came together. The rezoning and the lack of protection and special legislation for cultural initiatives that had occupied the vacant buildings many of these spaces had to move or close. Artist and neighborhood communities worked together for similar interest in preserving the heritage and local community. Despite the effort the 22@ did transform the neighborhood in many ways that the local community was not in favor. Yet thanks to the resistance of the neighborhood and artist communities some things were able to be saved. Among some is Hangar for example. These frictions due to the municipal strategies and sometimes aggressive plans have generated a network of critical communities throughout the city. A network that has in many ways influenced the last elections for a more progressive and community oriented model of governing.



*Ajuntament de Barcelona. (2017). Map of the district of Sant Martí and Poblenou, Barcelona. From: <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/santmarti/ca/article/el-districte-de-sant-marti>*

Poblenou after these long struggles and transformations has yet still a rich cultural community. Even though the price of housing has never stopped to increase unlike other areas of Barcelona, the grassroots and local culture of poblenou is still active and strong. Another threat the local community faces is the increase of tourist oriented business and housing. The touristification of poblenou also affects the dynamics of the area as well as the housing market. This has become a prime issue for the new government not only in Poblenou yet in other areas of the city such as the old city center or Barceloneta. Which has similar struggles between local residents and the tourism sector (Pareja-Eastaway, Simó-Solsona 2014)

Hangar, a key organization in the cities art community, is located in an industrial enclosure called Can Ricart that once was a very large factory that slowly became divided into various business and artist run initiatives. After the 22@ plan only Hangar survived in the industrial enclosure. The Can Ricart struggle is a very illustrative movement of the frictions occurring at the time. Unifying artist, historians, neighborhoods and activist in the same front against top-down urban planning. Thanks to this resistance by the Can-Ricart movement some areas were saved such as the part Hangar was occupying. Yet the other areas have been closed and left into decay in order to be restored in the



future. Hangar has continued to function ever since as an active catalyzer and meeting point for the visual arts community of Barcelona.

The Can Ricart struggle is key to understand the community and background of HAngar. Hangar in part was able to survive for it's capacity to find common interest with its surrounding community including the government and the businesses supporting the 22@ plan. Hangar was at the time run by the Catalan Association of Visuals Artist an important organization at the time as a spokesman for the visual arts community in Barcelona. The AAVC (Catalan Association of Visuals Artist) was a key actor in saving Hangar. Many other initiatives with less stable governance and support were able to find a solution to the difficult situation. Organizations that were maybe less institutional or of less interest for the government at the time were not able to find a solution to the problem. Forcing many to move or close.



Illustration by Quim Packard

Currently Poblenou still continues to attract creative organizations and artist. These organizations have though a different background or profile than the original projects found in the area in the 90's. Many are more business oriented or find ways to benefit by the international attractiveness the area offers. Being close to the beach and not far from the city center is one it's main traits of interest. The international community of Poblenou is though in many ways slightly different that the weekend

tourist that we may find in the city center. Poblenou attracts international professionals as well to use Poblenou as their home or second residency. Co-workings and hype cafes have bloomed in the area in part for this reason. Also attracting locals for its tranquil yet cosmopolitan vibe. Design schools such as BAU have moved to the area in part for this reason. Design studios or other creative industry businesses have also made Poblenou their home.

The original artists of the area do not necessarily look forward to having these organizations as part of their neighbors. The more “bohemian” or local environment is slowly giving way to a more hipster and gentrified atmosphere. We find that the visual artists do not necessarily share the same interests, language and objectives as the creative industry community. City governments and large branding campaigns blend the two communities as the same collective even though in certain cases they are opposing one another in various ways. What benefits one community does not necessarily benefit the other. An indicative example of this is the presence of two networking/mapping projects that have very similar functions yet work with these two communities separately. These two projects are “Poblenou Urban District” and “Tallers oberts de poblenou or Poblenou Crea”. The first is a private initiative that offers organizations to be part of a network and a map of the area. They organize well-branded events and impressive communication campaigns to support their network. The second “TOP Tallers oberts de Poblenou or Poblenou Crea” is the network of artist studios that open once a year. Both organizations have similar roles yet use different communication styles. TOP for example tries to offer art organizations visibility and a network but without entering the general umbrella of creative industries. TOP being also an organization previous to the 22@ has a tradition of activism and neighborhood engagement that the more recent “Poblenou Urban District” does not. These two organizations and their external and internal dynamics show the complexity and transformation the area has and is still going through. This struggle between communities in Poblenou can be compared to the campaign we mentioned earlier in Hamburg “Not in our name” (Novy, Colomb 2013). We can also relate these events to studies that indicate that artists often do not feel aligned with the “creative city” ideal (Markusen 2006; Novy, Colomb 2013; d’Ovidio, Rodríguez-Morató 2017).

The relation between art organizations with their local neighborhood community is a crucial factor in the Poblenou area. Both for city planners, the neighbors and the art center this relation is important. This issue almost led to the closure of the important public exhibition space Can Felipa in Poblenou during 2014. Can Felipa is an important open call and grant program for emerging artists from the city. Their publications, activities, talks and exhibitions are interwoven with the programming of many of the big international art institutions of Barcelona such as Fundació Miro, Fundació Tapies or MACBA. Can Felipa offers an opportunity for young artists to have a first show and connect with a more broader public. This stepping stone for not only artists yet for graphic designers, art critics and curators was threatened to be closed by the local government with the excuse that it was not serving the Poblenou community with enough attention. Even though Can Felipa had a clear purpose in the professional art network of the city as a whole it did not have a close dialog with its neighbors. After street protest by the art professionals and some local organizations as well as a recollection of signatures the Can Felipa art program was saved. The Can Felipa case shows how the proximity of art organizations with its neighbors is important (Bosco, El PAIS 2013)

The Poblenou neighborhood offers various examples of how policy makers, urban planners, art organizations, civil associations and art professionals struggle to find a common ground for

agreement. It's past and current situation show how various the various actors interact and have different agendas on how the neighborhood should be. The dynamics involved in the decision making are rarely permeable enough to allow all actors involved to have an equal voice. This leads us to the question that Markussen poses: "For whom does the creative city work for?" Certain occupational groups struggle to organize themselves to have a voice. Finding where are the policy entry points becomes an important task (Markussen 2009). Poblenu has and still is learning how to deal with these issues.

During the debates and worksessions of the research we have worked in close collaboration with Fireplace an arts organization situated in the Poblenu District. Fireplace has not only hosted the majority of our worksessions yet some of the members of our research group is part of the organization. Fireplace offers a co-working space for artist and creatives as well as organizes events related to the field of contemporary art. It is important to point out that during our investigation Fireplace is going through a process of eviction due to the acquisition by new owners of the building where it resides. The new owners wish to tear down the building in order to build apartments for the tourist economy. The transformation of the neighborhood and the struggles related to urban re-valuation has arrived at the front step of our investigation without knowing it. We will address this issue further on as a specific and very close event tied to our research process. The process that Fireplace is going through can correlate to many specific ideas we have addressed during our research.

### *Hospitalet*

Hospitalet is the second largest city in the region of Catalonia Spain. It's proximity to Barcelona makes it part of the same urban network yet it has it's own town hall and city management. It was originally an agricultural town in the vicinity of Barcelona that slowly grew into an industrial center. Once the industries started moving during the 70's certain areas fell into almost abandonment. New infrastructures and housing have been one of the main concerns of the city planning during the last years but after the 2005 crisis Hospitalet started to look for other directions of economic activities.



*Ajuntament d'Hospitalet de Llobregat (2017). Hospitalet de Llobregat. From: <http://www.l-h.cat/inici.aspx?id=1>*

The year 2012 the Hospitalet town hall starts making a plan to promote cultural activity. The year 2013 the Hospitalet Districte Cultural project was presented as the city's new plan for economic development. Without much definition the city wishes to create a cultural hub and re-vitalize industrial area with little use into a cultural center (Chicón-Voltà, García Fernández 2015). The project on its web site clearly indicates the urbanistic interventions yet vaguely define how it will promote cultural businesses and organizations.

During the last years various meetings have been taken place by some of the local cultural organizations concerning these issues. Many organizations were trying to be pro-active to make sure the new city planning would be helpful for them and not backfire against to grassroots and small projects like what happened in Poblenou. So far the project is very recent and still has not made any clear impact in the area. The changes that are visible are due to private initiatives moving to the area for cheap rents and not necessarily because of any government or policy intervention.

Salamina is part of these organizations that have very recently moved into the area with no connection with the government plan. A few art galleries have moved in the area as well with few connections with the city hall's project. The event Barcelona Gallery Weekend has done various activities in the area with the support of the city but we don't believe this is very relevant for the overall impact of the project.

The case of Hospitalet will be interesting to follow in the coming years. It will be interesting to see how the city implements the cultural plan and how will it defer or overcome difficulties found in other examples from other cities. The current situation is still semi-dormant yet with more direct observation it would be possible to identify strategies and objectives that are difficult to observe otherwise. For the art community of Barcelona it is relevant for the high prices and the lack of well

paid opportunities in Barcelona are forcing people to look for new solutions. Reducing the cost of the rent of studio spaces or exhibition spaces might be determining for survival even if this means moving to peripheral areas such as Hospitalet. Finding ways to manage this movement of the art community and fostering it through well designed cultural planning by the local officials could be helpful both for Hospitalet and the art sector. Yet if not done with care as in so many other places it can end up being unsustainable and harmful for both the local community and the art sector.

Again well planning and close dialog with all actors involved is important. In the next chapter we will begin to describe the ideas and questions shared during the work sessions. Both the cases of Poblenou and Hospitalet have offered examples of events that have occurred and are taking place in Barcelona today. The debates organized during this project illustrate various concerns that are directly related to the events of Poblenou and Hospitalet as well as the concepts described in earlier chapters.

## 5. Empirical Research

In the following chapter we will present the ideas and conversations that occurred during our empirical research through community observation, passive role work sessions and active role work sessions. They are organized by chronological order.

### 5.1 Community Observation: Hangar Production Center

Hangar is a non-profit private organization founded by the no longer running Catalan Visual Artist Association. It offers studios, grants, workshops, technical assistance and events for visual artist. It has a budget of around 600.000€ per year. It receives financing mostly from public institutions as well as some private organizations. It also generates revenue from services it offers. In total there are approximately six full time employees. It is located in the area of Poblenou and has been running since 1997. It offers up to 15 studios and 30 coworking tables.

Hangar has a board of trustees formed by different professionals from the art sector. They are all active members in the local art scene and are connected to other institutions. Through this network of trustees as well as the employee's, artist in residents and users Hangar is a hub of conversations about the art context as well as fertile ground for movements of change.

We have been in close contact with Hangar through shared projects and informal meetings and conversations. Throughout these encounters we have traced debates occurring within and around the structure. We have selected a few of these concerns that are related to other ideas outlined in this research.

#### *Production not exhibition space*

Hangar was consolidated from a reaction of the local cultural planning of not taking into account the necessity for production spaces for artist. At the time the local administration was focusing very much on exhibition spaces such as the MACBA but not in spaces to produce the art needed to fill in the exhibitions. The Artist Association founded Hangar with the desire to fill in that niche. Hangar offered workspaces and production assistance for artist living and working in the Catalunya region. Concentrating on production and not on exhibiting works has been it's task. External and internal pressure by artist have sometimes urged hangar to do otherwise and organize more open to public and exhibition like events. The local government who is the main funder of the project has repeatedly tried to persuade hangar to be more open to the general public and visible. Putting resources into being open and visible takes away resources in production and artistic research for it's users. Finding an equilibrium is not always easy. Artist need a space to work which is not always accessible for the wider audience. Even though Hangar does organize many public events and open studios it still sometimes is criticized for being inaccessible. Some artist consider it very important to be in touch with a general audience and to other professional. Similar debates can happen with scientific research centers where public governments or funders may pressure the research to be more porous and visible even though researchers are not always interested in this approach. Finding an equilibrium between open and hermetic is a challenge for workspaces in many fields. In projects like MITlab in Boston how to regulate the openness is key to it's success and methods of funding. Access to the MITlab is very limited yet once inside the spaces are designed to share parts of the research process going on daily. For companies to access the labs they must pay hefty fees to have a guided tour through the labs

and even then they are controlled and guided. But MIT is a private institution Hangar is majority publicly funded. Accessibility to public institutions is treated differently.

### *Artist needs*

Another difficulty that Hangar often runs into is adapting to change of the artist needs. When Hangar was founded it considered that artist needed simply a wide and private space to produce art. After some years it focused on other services such as renting out cameras or having available video sets and editing booths. Today much of this has become obsolete due to the change of technology. Hangar also offers a production team to help asses large production processes for artist. Yet due to the economic recession artist are doing smaller types of production that often does not need assessment or cannot afford it. Today Hangar must adapt to the new needs of artist and possibly change or close certain services. It is not clear thought what do artist need during their production process. Artist have become more and more independent in recent years. Social media and email has made it much easier for artist to stay connected without sharing a physical space. More accessible technology has made it easier for artist to do sound or video productions with their own means and the knowledge to do so is becoming more and more common. The type of art works have also changed. The diversity of formats has shifted the art practice away from only making physical art works and more and more almost de-materialized formats are present. An artwork can be a simple walk through the city to a bag full of dust. The diversity of what art can be, makes it difficult to determine what artist need to produce an artwork.

### *What communities does Hangar serve*

Hangar is expected to serve the community of artist, but which artist? What do they mean by artist? This is another aspect that creates confusion and friction. Currently Hangar has a strong program in robotics and electronic research as well as innovation. Not all artist need these services and they may eclipse other needs of other types of artist. To determine what are the actual needs of the artist today a simple survey could be done. A possible indicator could be what production requirements do exhibitions by local artist have. This question becomes a political question as well. What part of the art community Hangar chooses to serve has larger implications that are related to economic, social and political issues. The precariousness of the context can to communities within the arts to turn against each other instead of working together. Competing for resources and recognition can easily impoverish the overall sector. Government officials might take advantage of this situation to push through agendas without general consent or well studied planing. This debate is delicate and has still to be resolved.

## **5.2 Community Observation: Meetings with the Network of independent art spaces in Barcelona**

In 2016 the city of Barcelona awarded the network of independent art spaces in Barcelona with a mention of honor in the “Ciutat de Barcelona” prizes. This encouraged the already existing network to increase their meetings and intensify their effort to work together. Loop video festival 2016 hired curator Rosa Lleo from the art space Greenparrot to curate a program of events in various independent spaces. In September of 2016 during the Barcelona art fair Swab various spaces were also invited free of cost to take part in the fair. More recently in Madrid during the ARCO art fair in February 2017 the project Salon curated a fair in a Metro station in Madrid inviting various of the spaces from Barcelona including similar projects from south America and other mediterranean countries in Europe. During

these encounters and more informal ones various conversations have been taking place. Our objective is to scan and thread together some of the ideas that have sprouted during these formal and informal encounters. The spaces that have been present during the talks and encounters are: Passatge Studio, Bar Project, Green Parrot, Halfhouse, Homesession, Fireplace and more informally Passadis, Nyamnyam, el Palomar and Latitudes.

The ideas we will describe will be the following:

- Difficulty of finding a common ground
- What are there needs?
- Dialoguing with the local government
- Sharing difficulties, sharing resources

#### *Difficulty of finding a common ground*

One of the first issues that arose during the encounters was the obvious differences between each project. This also led to wondering who should be part of the network and why. What made us similar and what made us different? Some of the projects were very new others very small, some ran a physical space others not and this went on and on. All the projects did share more or less the same conception of what art was and what type of art we wished to promote and program. In general they all work with professional artist or professionally focused artist and were all inclined towards a more conceptual type of art with ties to a academic and international setting. All projects are independent in the sense that they are not part of a public structure nor a large private institution. Their funding comes from various sources (Grants, donations, services, etc.). Their difficulties in finding a stable form of income is what they share most. Another aspect in common is their critical perspective towards institutions and cultural policies, in other words, a willingness to offer an alternative to the official art scene. Some projects may have a more standardized formal position than others yet all consider that they are offering an alternative to the large institutions. Not so much as a critique towards them yet as a way to complement and offer things that the large institutions do not.

#### *What are there needs?*

When expressing their situations we arrived rapidly to a type of wish list idea. What could help them do better or survive in some cases? Some of the ideas that arose were:

- Having a space free of charge
- Better designed grant procedures for small independent spaces
- More dialogue with the local government
- More proximity to large institutions
- A large event that could help gain more visibility

Even though these ideas have been present in various talks and encounters none have been followed through. No general decision has been taken either. It is difficult to find a common agreement on almost any of these issues. They only agree in unison on having better designed grants and more dialogue with the local government. These two aspects seem to be agreed on by all.

#### *Dialoguing with the local government*

The new government has rapidly started being more open and has showed interest in knowing more about the network of independent spaces. A series of meetings were organized to talk about there



needs and dynamics. Some of these meetings afterwards branched off into more personalized meetings with the local representatives. The concerns for a change of design of grants was clearly expressed and the local representatives showed concern and expressed their compliance to bring such change. A year later when the new grant open call was made public the change that was promised did not arrive. There has been a slight modification and addition to the grants yet they still do not satisfy the real needs of the independent initiatives. The main issue that was discussed was the necessity of having grants that guaranteed funding for more than one year. This has been done yet only for new projects and not for already existing ones. Obviously for the already existing network this did not help. Yet there has been a clear change of attitude and proximity towards the small initiatives. Hopefully this dialogue will bring fruit that actually have a lasting effect. Recent new changes in the city government though has produced less hope for the network. The classic Socialist party is now in charge of the culture department of the city due to political alliances that the new left (BCN en comú) earlier mentioned has done to gain stability. This seems to have created a new wave of despair among many cultural workers who had hopes in the new government.

#### *Sharing difficulties, sharing resources*

The enthusiasm to share resources and find a common front to pressure local governments or other institutions is present yet few obvious results have arose. For now some ideas such as sharing a common administrator or making a collective event have emerged. Even if none of these ideas have yet been put into action the network has still been useful to share knowledge and ideas. It is also important to give a sense of solidarity and collectivity. Even though the network has not brought forth clear results we believe that in the future it will strengthen the local community and help the initiatives grow.

### **5.3 Passive Role Work Session: GRAF Meeting**

Graf is an independent project that appeared in 2014 with the goal to help connect and coordinate institutions and organizations in the contemporary art scene of Barcelona. It's main focus was to create an online calendar to encourage coordination between organizations. This simple idea was one of the first shared tools that large and small organizations shared. GRAF in a sense represented a sense of community between different initiatives. Recently GRAF is thinking of how to re-invent itself giving more emphasis on the idea of community and maybe less to the standard calendar sharing tool. The recently change of coordinator of the project and a possible interest by the city government to fund the project has re-activated the project with more energy. Individual meetings have been set placed with the organizers of the project and members of various institutions as well as a meeting with all the GRAF users. This meeting took place the 21st of January in Fabra i Coats and was an engaging episode to captivate many emerging debates.

The participants of the event where: GRAF Team: Julieta Dentone, Berta Canela, Marc Permanyer, Luz Broto, Marc Vives. Organizers or directors of the spaces: Espai Colona, L'Automática, Blue Project, La Capella, Fireplace, SAC, El Graner, Espacio Práctico, nyamnyam, La Capella, Fireplace Fundació Joan Miró, The Green Parrot, Hangar.

As well as Ruben Ramos Nogueira (from Teatron magazine) and Tere Badia (director of Hangar). From the ICUB (Institut of Culture of Barcelona) Carles Giner.

There were two concerns we wish to rescue from the Jornades GRAF: the shared feeling that being part of a community was important and that more coordination between institutions is needed. GRAF in a sense points towards these two concerns. Yet neither can be easily resolved without an investment of resources and time. These resources can come from each member of the community or some type of public or private organization. Yet even if there would be external resources to finance the coordination of meetings and facilitate more communication between members of the community some resource and dedication from the organizations is crucial. Many organizations want to be connected to the network but put no resources in doing so. You can make better pathways but if people don't want to move the pathways it won't help. Yet GRAF objective is to improve the pathways so connections can happen easier. Networks, associations, symposiums or meetings all serve to link and connect people, ideas, initiatives, concerns and projects together. GRAF is trying to do so in a very subtle yet clear way.

Projects like GRAF can improve significantly the art scene. Finding ways to maintain these inter-organizational projects is key. GRAF needs funding to do its task and some of the organizations part of GRAF have little resources to invest. Larger institutions who might be less in need of a project like GRAF might tend to be less willing to invest resources in the project even if they have them. Public support or private funding could help GRAF survive. Hopefully the project will be able to find solution to its funding and bring effective results for the community.

#### **5.4 Passive Role Work Session February 2017: Roundtable in Fireplace project, “What space does art need?”**

On the 28th of February 2017 with the help of Fireplace place project we organized a roundtable about managing independent art centers. The central question was about what physical spaces were needed to manage, exhibit, produce, share, investigate about, observe and consume art. By looking at the physical space the objective was to branch off into other questions related to the needs of the artistic community such as: social responsibility, economic situation, the politics of art and the relation between the arts and a bigger ecosystem. This session was part of an ongoing project of Fireplace related to the analysis of the dynamics of a independent art space in Barcelona. This first activity was part of a work process with students from ESDI (Escola Superior de Disseny) and architect Mariona Alcaraz as the professor of the project course in the school. Fireplace was used as a research case to elaborate a study about how is the physical space of Fireplace actually used and what are its strengths and weaknesses. The students made a proposal of possible changes for Fireplace as well as various discussions about what is an independent art space and how do they work. From these discussions Fireplace wished to open a larger debate to other professionals in the field and observe how this issue can be addressed at a larger scale and what other problems were these questions related to.

The guest speakers to the event where:

Mariona Alcaraz, architect specialized in energy efficiency related to conduct, habits and culture changes in communities.

Oriol Fontdevila, art curator, critic and cultural manager of the Sala d'Art Jove public grant program.

Priscila Clementti, graphic designer specialized in art publications and catalogs as well as co-worker in Fireplace.

Lara Garcia, researcher specialized in art, economy and post-fordism from a sociological perspective.

Marc Vives, artist and curator of artist residency Nau Estruch in Sabadell Barcelona.  
Fireplace team: Angela Palacios and Quim Packard, artists, cultural managers and curators.

Among the assistants who also participated in the debate were.

Ariadna Rodriguez from the cultural platform Nyamnyam.

Caterina Almirall curator of the independent space Passadís and professor of sociology of art at the University of Barcelona

Agustín Fernandez coordinator of the independent space Green Parrot

Andrés Vial curator of the independent space Espai Colona

Martina Milá curator of Mirò Foundation

Antonio Ortega artist and professor at the Escola Massana Barcelona

Eulàlia Rovira artist

Sophie director of CanSerrat residency in el Bruc

Each guest speaker was invited to bring a question concerning the issue of the debate with the goal to try to answer the question collectively. It started with this procedure yet rapidly the conversation began moving around the room from different subjects. The first question came from Marc Vives. His question was “Why don’t art spaces hire more artist to manage and run art organizations?”. The debate branched of in various directions. We will try to resume into 5 categories the points addressed.

- Precariousness and sustainability
- Big institutions and small initiatives
- Closed or open communities
- The role of art
- Other perspectives and new experiments
- Cultural policies and political planning

#### *Precariousness and sustainability*

The concern for economic sustainability was present both from an individual and organizational stand. The difficulty of most members of the debate to make ends meet both personally as well as for their organizations was shared. Yet it was not addressed as a new issue yet as a continuous state in which art professionals are submitted to. The independent organizations in Barcelona rarely reach three years because of their difficulty to find economic and personal sustainability. People simply get burnt up. The funding from public institutions is too scarce and difficult to obtain to make it viable to depend on. Small organizations often give up because of the immense bureaucratic work it involves. Public funding demands a type of economic scrutiny that small organizations are not use to or do not have the means to fulfill (money to pay an accountant for example). This leads to what some of the local community call the “three year rule” which implies that small organizations run out of personal energy to continue after three years.

On the other hand, private funding is rare and often clashes with the general culture of the artistic scene in Barcelona. Fund raising is inexistent in the local scene. This is due possibly to a scarcity of private donors yet also because there is a general discomfort towards the fundraising model within the arts community. Other models such as galleries that have art works for sale are rare at a Artist Run or grassroot level in Barcelona. More so within the network we are addressing which is highly academic

orientated, very critical and with already a professional background that connects them to top institutions and galleries such as MACBA, Tapies Foundation or Mirò Foundation. There are some galleries that have a good relationship with the independent projects we are addressing yet their sales are also scarce and for now there has been little interest to actually support the independent platforms economically.

So we find a underground or middleground network of small independent organizations that are missing ways to become long term projects. In some cases these projects have been absorbed by bigger institutions yet this can also affect their independence and capacity to be innovative and generate their own community of followers. There are also a few cases of projects that have found ways to have enough public funding to thrive yet with difficulty and sometimes having to sacrifice certain aspects such as flexibility, spontaneity and freshness. Because they must adapt to the bureaucratic system of public funding their overall vibe becomes more institutional. Some projects such as Nyamnyam found themselves falling into this problem and have decided to search for other models.

The general conclusions of this tight catch that organizations find themselves in is that or the institutions (public or private) that usually fund these types of initiatives must change or the independent projects must change. From the cultural manager perspective it is often thought that it must be the independent projects that must learn to overcome the model of cultural activism or self-exploitation and become more efficient and effective at finding economic sustainability. Even if this implies changing the product that these spaces offer. This might imply radically changing their model and ways of relating themselves with their audience/community/users. Yet this is often seen a much to large price to pay for the artistic community in order to achieve economic sustainability. Therefore the usual conclusion from within the sector is that the public system and institutions must change and learn to support better and fulfill the needs of the artistic community. This double sided perspective of the problem is difficult to resolve.

#### *Big institutions and small initiatives*

When tracing out the artistic sector of Barcelona we find both large institutions and small organizations. For the small organizations being aware of their dialog and relationship with these large institutions is important. During the debate in Fireplace various perspectives arouse. Small organizations are often understood as initiative that sprout as a reaction to the incapacity of big institutions to fulfill certain necessities of the local context. Independent projects can also be a result of the incapacity of big institutions or the overall system to absorb all the professionals that wish to dedicate themselves to artistic management and curating art. Possibly it is a mix of both causes.

Big institutions often feed from what small organizations are doing. Sometimes they try to absorb some of these initiatives by co-organizing activities for example. Yet other large institutions work with their backs to small initiatives. Big structures often generate types of employees and curators that have “no time” to go to small openings or to chit-chat in order to understand what is happening in other levels. With their eyes focused only on the international level organizations can lose touch with the local community. This can happen both to big and small organizations. How can small and large organizations learn and benefit from one another was one of the debates present in Fireplace during the roundtable.

Another question that was placed on the table was “Are independent spaces curating different types of activities from the big organizations or are they simply scaled down versions of the same?” “Does the scale influence in the content?” It is obvious that the lack of resources does influence the content yet not necessarily in a bad way. Proximity between the small organizations managers and their public, users and artist was something that large institutions often lacked. This is something that is usually very highly valued. Yet openness was not always an attribute that small organizations have. Small organizations offer a decentralized network of art programs throughout the city that large institutions do not. Large institutions commonly fulfill political needs such as international visibility and recognition from the press yet a mesh of small organizations could be a more rooted system to the cities needs.

Yet city governments want control over the program of art organizations. A model of funding many smaller initiatives would be difficult to control and to attribute to their political success. Easy branding is commonly what politicians want when deciding to fund or not a program. Branding in the sense of something easy to communicate and understand for a large public. Complicated and experimental projects can be difficult to simplify and communicate therefore are less favorable of receiving public funds. New infrastructures (museums, art centers, etc.) on the other hand are simple to represent through a headline and a photograph. Even though the infrastructures may not be what a community's needs they are useful highlights for city branding.

#### *Closed or open communities*

The capacity of broadening or increasing the audience to small initiatives is often limited. The spaces that these organizations run are usually small and of not easy or of obvious access. They are not always well indicated and advertised. Their communication outreach is conditioned by their direct contacts or online community. They do not have large numbers of social network followers and rarely use traditional channels of communication such as newspaper, television or radio. Nor do they spend much resources in printing leaflets or posters to advertise their events. These methods among other things condition their outreach and their community of followers. In comparison with larger institutions large amounts of resources are invested in communication and outreach to new and existing communities of users. The limited outreach of these communities can be seen as something negative for they can seem closed or even elitist. They can be stigmatized as closed communities and not active open nodes for interaction and exchange. On the other hand tight networks have other very positive aspects to be valued. Proximity is one of them as we mentioned earlier yet the agility and capacity of taking risk is another. Within these communities a common language is often shared and encounters can interconnect and build upon each other without restarting each conversation from ground zero. Members of these communities have less difficulty to interact with each other and propose new ideas, changes and make suggestions. This slightly closed network becomes a fertile ground for innovation and experimentation. Not having to comply to the general public's demands and language the small community can be more direct and effective. The same way a scientific community does not have to speak among each other with a language suitable for the general public the artistic community as well needs these types of environments in order to create. Many people at the talk, mentioned that for them they would consider it a burden if they would have to always be attending the needs of a broad public. They also agreed though that a certain amount of openness was

very enriching and fulfilling. This part of the discussion led us to the question of “What is the role of art and what are the responsibilities of art organizations?”.

### *The role of art*

“To promote social transformation!” was the answer of this question for Oriol Fontdevila. Fontdevila suggest that art organization must be in constant mutation in order to promote friction and to adapt to the debates that are constantly changing and emerging. Yet others were not so aligned with this idea. For small organizations it is very difficult to be constantly changing and the weight of a public responsibility can sometimes paralyze certain initiatives. Spontaneity is a tool that small initiatives have on their side and having very heavy responsibilities can difficult their capacity to navigate and react to opportunities. Such opportunities can be a blow of enthusiasm by a group of artist or the possibility to collaborate with a larger structure. Playfulness and pleasure are also important for small organizations to survive, this is often the main resource they thrive on. The heavy load of work and multitasking that running these small projects require is often only possible by balancing them out with enjoyment and good atmosphere. This can imply sometimes not knowing what and what they are doing exactly yet knowing that they are enjoying it. The capacity of acting in such way is one of the small structures strength and through this mode of functioning results become often very fresh and innovative. For public institutions a lack of clear goals is difficult to defend. Yet at a small scale, spaces for wandering are crucial for the overall ecosystem. In the discussion at Fireplace no consented conclusion was established on the question of “what is the role of art?”. Everybody agreed that is was important yet in various ways. For many professionals in the art scene this question is sterile and obvious in a way. There is a sense that art is too often being judged for being useless yet rarely do we hear people questioning if shopping malls, science or professional sports are useful or not. Art organizations and art professionals get tired of defending their field and sometimes prefer investing energy in making art, exhibitions, etc. Artist Jose Begega during the talk precisely made this point saying: “How often do people ask if rugby players are useful or not?”. When questioning the role of art professionals can get irritated. Yet others agree that it is a key element to understand in order to be able to promote art and defend it when necessary. Many organizations and artist agree that art is and must constantly be changing yet they don’t always agree in what way. Similar to scientist artist often reclaim the possibility to not always bear clear results. Experimentation is necessary and this also means that sometimes not everybody understands what artist and art organizations are doing. To be able to wander is precisely one of arts functions. Finding ways to make public these wanderings without destroying the experimental aspect of certain digressions and investigations is the hard part. With limited resources it forces organizations often to prioritize and may make them lean towards the less experimental side. Politicians and the private market often will prefer easy to communicate and flashy results over those that may be more complex and innovative. Defending that art is not only to beautify yet also to explore, wander and question using complex language systems is what the professional art community so often defends. Small initiatives can often escape the grasp of over simplification because they do not need to please large numbers of audiences and buyers. Yet this also can doom them in being marginal and with short resources to continue.

### *Other perspectives and new experiments*

While talking about other possible models and changes in art organizations models three aspects were addressed: funding, community and outputs. The difficulty often involves how to access more funding without changing your community or outputs. From a business perspective this may seem like a

nightmare. How to increase incomes without changing seems very difficult. But the art community is open to change yet not all change. What was interesting to discuss during the meeting was what aspects is the art community willing to change. Certain projects have offered interesting models in this sense. Nyamnyam is one of them. Nyamnyam is an art project that pivots almost all its activities around food. It invites artists to do projects that involves some aspect of eating, cooking, sharing or producing food. They also curate or cater events for organizations, festivals etc. The aspect of food gives them a specificity and value that distinguishes them from other art organizations. Using a popular and accessible element such as food they gain attractiveness and openness to more audiences. On the other hand Nyamnyam has stayed very committed to experimentation and investigation. Their events often consist of very intellectual and complex issues as well as easy to understand elements. The combination of the two has helped them move around and gain “clients” from many different sectors. Yet Nyamnyam’s model even though it is more open and innovative than others has not been successful at generating a sustainable economy. Recently Ariadna Rodriguez and Iñaki Alvarez (the organizers of Nyamnyam) are thinking of stopping the project or re-directing it completely. Nyamnyam also departs from the basis that Alvarez is an excellent cook and that both of them are in love with food and cooking. Other projects may not have the capacity or knowledge to open up such as Nyamnyam has. On the other hand some members of the art community may have considered Nyamnyam not being committed enough to what art making should be. Mixing art with food can be seen as a way of dissolving or reducing art to something that cannot defend itself on it’s own. Traditionalist could see Nyamnyam as a model that has succumbed to the pressure of a more consumerist system. This debate could be compared to the relation between science and applied science. Some scientist and researchers become exasperated when they cannot do “pure science” and must adapt to the new trends of governments and funding organizations. The art community has similar struggles. Though many artist also consider that art can only be enriched when transcending its own traditional discipline. Working with other fields it being cooking, farming, science or architecture only makes art more rich and inspiring.

### *Cultural policies and political planning*

There was a general consensus that the situation of the art scene was not fantastic. New technologies and digital media facilitated the emergence of a larger network and more independent initiatives but finding economic sustainability was still an issue. Before the 2005 crisis things were possibly easier for some but still weren’t that great. The post crisis generations could not compare with other times and have learned to survive with scarcity of resources. Yet many members of the community and people present during the talk have traveled and worked abroad for short or long periods of time and can compare the local scene with others of large cities such as Berlin, Amsterdam, New York, Paris or London. The lack of imagination or ideas is not necessarily the problem. There is a willingness to adapt and find new models by some initiatives. Encouragement and facilitation by part of the local government is needed. A grant procedure designed for small organizations would be very much applauded. Currently the bureaucracy involved and the format of grant proposals swamp small initiatives. Grants need to be more flexible currently they can only cover than 50% of the budget of small organizations. This is very difficult for little projects with scarce alternative income. It would also be very helpful if the grants are not payed a year late and could be for projects of more than a year long as they are now. The city grants of cities like Roterdam that last two to three years would be a much better model according to the needs of the present arts community. These are only a few of the changes that many of the participants of the talk agreed on yet there are other ways of looking at

the problem. Again another example that shows up in recurrent conversations is how the local government tends to give large amounts to big festivals and very little to small initiatives. The political interest for easy to brand cultural policies is a constant grudge for small experimental projects. No matter what political party in power this seems to be a recurrent problem. Convincing the governments that other strategies are needed and important to foster a vibrant active artistic community is difficult and may take decades or never happen.

### **5.5 Active Role Work Session 1. Meeting with Ariadna Rodriguez, Lara Garcia and Caterina Almirall.**

On Tuesday 18 of April we organized a meeting with Ariadna Rodriguez (Organizer of Nyamnyam), Lara Garcia (PHD Researcher) and Caterina Almirall (PHD researcher and independent curator). The objective of the meeting was to share the research and conclusions that have been sketched out through the previous encounters. The conversation took place in an informal setting and hoped to encourage horizontal debate. All three participants were part of the debate during the first round-table in Fireplace about “What space does art need?”. Both Ariadna Rodriguez and Caterina Almirall are part of the Network of Independent Space and have been active in various previous discussions concerning the network. Both have written recent articles for online local magazines about the subject of independent art spaces and the local context. These are the reasons we chose to create this small work group commission for this research. All three volunteered to take part in the following sessions of the research and explore how this research can have larger repercussions outside the academic field. It is important to note that this is the first Active Role Session therefor we will write in third person as if the decisions were made collectively and with the participation of the researcher. As we described in the research plan the researcher is as well an active member of the art community and considers many of the following aspects directly related to his own profession and livelihood.

The central issues that were debated are the following:

- Difficulty of defining professional practice
- New economies
- Small communities versus massive events
- Objectives of the research

#### *Difficulty of defining professional practice*

During the whole debate one thing that all participants agreed on was the difficulty of defining our professional practice. The difficulty was not only in defining our own practice yet also the field that we consider of interest and worth promoting and strengthening. We all agreed that the definition of Visual Arts was not precise enough. For there were many practices within the field of Visual Arts that we did not feel identified with and many practices outside the sector we did. Social responsibility and critical perspectives for example was always part of the practices we find interesting yet not necessarily in the way we would find in classic activism. Experimentation, playfulness, strangeness where also something we all considered important. Overly pragmatic and methodical processes were often limiting and did not go hand in hand with the type of practices most of us were interested in. We shared the interest for art as a way to articulate with other disciplines. So we considered that many other disciplines such as science, ecology, farming, economy, urbanism, social studies, etc... were also part of the field we wished to work in. This transdisciplinary perspective though is often



difficult to define and apply when working in a disciplinary oriented system. Finding ways to define this type of transdisciplinary, socially engaged and experimental approach was one of the topics of the meeting. Yet according to some of the participants defining this method might not be necessary. It is more important in finding ways to apply it than to define it. The idea of camouflage emerged as a way of inserting certain practices within a system that would usually exclude otherwise. Ariadna Rodriguez gave the example of Nyamnyam and how they use cooking as a vehicle to generate a frame to apply new practices. Nyamnyam is very experimental in how they conduct their sessions and food almost becomes an excuse to get people talking, thinking and doing things together. Lara Garcia gave examples of how art can be used as a camouflage for activist actions. Under the umbrella of art certain activist projects can be developed without excessive surveillance. Another idea was simply using invisibility or un-definition as a way to function. Staying within the margins can capacitate projects to develop in non-conventional ways. Having too much attention makes it more difficult sometimes to be flexible, attentive to new necessities, playful and critical. The responsibility of the spotlight can be heavy and suffocating. Heavy public responsibility often makes projects continue things in orthodox and expected ways and does not give place for investigation and taking risks. Yet being out of the spotlight also mean more difficulty in having economical retributions. Surviving economically on the margins is where the real challenge lies. It can be also difficult to have political demands and generate solidarity when situated outside the frames in some cases. Yet the idea of camouflage continued to swim back into the conversation as a solution. Embracing the definition instead of fighting it. But would this practice not be considered as a way of “selling out” to external pressure? As we mentioned earlier when describing Nyamnyam’s practice. Adapting can lead to changing into something different that we are no longer comfortable with. We also debated if camouflage might be individualistic and not encourage collectivity. Non definition in front of a larger system can maybe lead to invisibility to our equals. How can this camouflage work and in what cases can it be applied? It is not the same for a large institution to use camouflage depending on who they wish to please than a small organization in order to infiltrate a hostile environment. Yet we all agreed that camouflage and invisibility can be seen as a strength in many cases and exploring it’s possibilities can lead to interesting results.

#### *New economies*

How to survive within the margins economically became a recurrent subject during the session. The product that we find interesting to offer has often little demand or is difficult to define in order to gain economic support. Neither the public or private system in Barcelona offers many alternatives. We ended up talking about the idea of Universal Basic Income. Having a basic income would allow experimental and risk taking practices to survive without having to attend to the directives of capitalism. It would also allow projects to survive without having to adapt to the fundings designed by the political necessities of the government in power. There is quite an amount of research on this concept. In our case we all agree that we don’t know enough about it to fully defend it. But that is definitely a concept worth considering and learning more about. In the meanwhile we must still find ways to maintain and support certain organizations and practices that are fragile.

#### *Small communities versus massive events*

We also all agreed that it is necessary to have room for small networks and events. Fostering closed communities is crucial for the type of activities we consider valuable. Proximity, intimacy and comfort generate very fertile atmospheres. Also small communities add to diversity of opinions,

visions, etc. A system that only permits large networks to prosper reduces the diversity of a system. Yet the economical and political framework does not encourage these environments and organizations. Public planning and the private sector tends to mend large events for big numbers of audiences. Small communities are often tagged as elitist. The problem is that the artistic practices we find relevant are often marginal and therefore have a reduces number of followers. Public institutions have difficulty finding ways to promote such practices and can be pushed easily into programing only popular and mainstream events. Leaving the margins of both public and private funding for more experimental and critical programs and activities.

### *Objectives of the research*

We asked ourselves if this research project was mapping debates or necessities of the artistic sector? Where we making a diagnostic of the needs of the sector or simply tracing concerns and ideas that are becoming recurrent? Lara Garcia suggested that mapping necessities could be a way to then try to find solutions and that mapping debates was a much more diffused idea. Lara Garcia also questioned what parameters where we following in order to map out the debates. Caterina Almirall found that what was interesting about the project was that we where threading connections between groups and conversations that would otherwise not be linked together. Structuring these concerns and sharing them could become very useful. We wondered how we could make a diagnostic of the situation and what criteria would we follow to do such a task? What would validate this diagnostic and map that we have been drawing? Yet we agreed that generating an “excuse” to meet and talk about shared concerns was already very positive. The results of these connections is unclear though hopefully something will emerge. The possibility of articulating the debates and structuring them in some kind of actions would be interesting. Though finding a common ground seemed the most challenging to unify these debates into action. Not to mention for example the private sector with whom we have had little contact. Galleries for example often sing a very different tune on certain issues than independent spaces or large public institutions. A much longer process of negotiations, coordination and conversations would be needed. The city government is or was currently trying to do a similar task and for now has not seemed to have succeeded. An option would be to try to collaborate with the city to do precisely this task of mapping debates and necessities.



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## **5.6 Active Role Work session 2. First draft of conclusions proposal presentation to participants of research**

On the 9th of May we invited various members who have been present and active in many sessions we have analyzed during this research. Unfortunately a small number of people were able to assist to the session we organized. During this session we presented various conclusions we have elaborated during the research. After the presentation we opened the debate to all participants. Some concerns re-appeared from other sessions yet few new clear ideas emerged. The general conclusion was though that more meetings of this type were needed in order to share our concerns.

The participants of the session were:

Ariadna Rodriguez (Co-founder of Nyamnyam)

Julietta Dentone (Coordinator of GRAF)

Angela Palacios (Co-founder of Fireplace project)

Lara Garcia (PHD Researcher)

Sophie Blais (Director of Can Serrat residency)

Olivier Collet (Director of Homession)

Bernat Daviu (Co-founder of Passatge Studio and Bonbon gallery)

Danilo Pioli (Coordinator of Homession)

The conclusions of the research we presented were the following:

The situation of the contemporary visual arts sector in Barcelona is in a precarious present state. There are very limited existing modes of gaining a living within it. Even more when looking at experimental, socially committed and critical practices. Nor Public or private current systems are accessible or welcoming for many small initiatives and experimental practices. Even when many practices are able to be exposed or co-exist within the current system they are not supported enough to have long term economic sustainability.

Yet in order to not give up hope we must continue generating activity and finding ways to be committed to its growth. The methods we propose are:

- Advocating change in political policies and cultural budgets
- Investigating new economical models that can foster experimental, socially committed and critical art.
- Promoting activities that build community, interest and critical mass around experimental, socially committed and critical artistic practices.

The objectives of these meetings are to foster connectivity and solidarity among similar focused projects and practices and possibly find guidelines for further action.

We will synthesis three issues that emerged after the presentation of this brief statement:

### *Recurring difficulty to define our practices and organizations*

While exposing the conclusions of the anterior debates the members of the meeting pointed out one of the main recurring concerns: our difficulty to define what unites the members of the meeting. Yet this problem has been constant in almost all conversations mapped out through this research. During this

final session it was directed towards the difficulty to delimit what are independent spaces or “espais autogestionats”, private spaces and public institutions. The participants suggested that the differences between these three classifications are not very clear. It was also not clear what was within the market system and what was not. In a certain sense this was disconcerting. How could networks of solidarity be built and common settings to advocate or work in a common direction if we did not know what united us in the first space.

*Classic methods of advocating for change are exhausting and inefficient*

Several participants mentioned that classic association formats were difficult to adjust too. Many had little time to spare and classic associative organization often demanded many hours of meetings and debates that seemed to lead to little results. Many classic models became very bureaucratic and lost freshness and agility. Possibly these organization did help to advocate certain issues at a political level yet maybe not at a more tangible level. It was not clear if they increased connectivity and community culture. This often discouraged participants to continue working with large more political organizations. How to create groups that can still generate pressure politically yet do not become heavy and overly time consuming was a general concern. Meetings should also be flexible and inspiring in order to gain momentum and share enthusiasm. The energy needed to create networks must be treated with care and attention. Debating excessively pragmatic and large problems was often the cause of despair and loss of interest. Working at a micro-level and with sufficient openness to let conversations and intuitions wander and be shared was considered necessary. Yet it was also important to find ways to change things in a visible way.

*Connectivity continues to be crucial*

All members expressed interest to continue organizing similar sessions. Sharing, talking and learning together in a relaxed and informal way was clearly something everyone appreciated. How to continue these meetings, with who and when was less easy to decide. Juliette Dentone from GRAF mentioned that GRAF is open for suggestions and that we should take advantage of their platform as a tool to precisely encourage more encounters like these. GRAF shared many objectives with the research project and participants taking advantage of this could be a beneficial for everyone. This was welcomed as a good suggestion and considered as very interesting option. GRAF is organizing another day of debates soon with a more festive approach. Organizing it collectively seemed to be an option to share responsibility and use the existing infrastructure and resources of GRAF to follow through much of these debates mapped out during this project. Fireplace will also be organizing a debate in the city of Sant-Cugat near Barcelona again about “What space does art need”. This was also observed as an opportunity to thread together more ideas and activate conversations that need more time to mature.



Illustration by Quim Packard

## 6. Conclusions

In this last chapter I will outline ideas we have obtained from the worksessions as well as from the bibliographic research. I will explain perspectives for further research and ideas for a more sustainable future of the artistic sector. To finalize I will give an account of a series of recent events directly related with the research team that summarize many aspects of the current situation in the context of Barcelona

### 6.1 Discontent towards the situation of the art sector in Barcelona

The most urgent matter that emerged during the research is the participants general discontent towards the situation of the art sector in Barcelona. They are preoccupied with the situation of the art context in Barcelona and believe that it needs serious changes. They are worried for their difficulty to obtain economical stability within the current cultural policies and the current private market. This discomfort branches into various other issues that I will now explain.

The main reasons for the discontent are as follows:

**Precariousness of art workers:** Precariousness is a state of normality for most small organizations and art workers and nothing is bringing hope that things will change. The current situation leads the participants to imagine a dark future for art professionals.

**The role of context:** The type of art works, institutions and dynamics the artist that participated in the research consider relevant and beneficial for society are not well supported by cultural policies and have not found private models that can sustain them. As a whole the current economic and the cultural policies do not favor stability for art professionals no matter what their practice is. Even if the instability for these professions is historical this does not mean it should not be addressed. Public and

private institutions often consider that art workers should not be paid to show or produce their work. When paid art workers are often under-paid or paid late. They are often expected to advance money for production and other previous cost. Contracts are rarely signed and most works are based on a verbal agreement and not a legal one. Organizations assume that artists rely on private sales in galleries and fairs to generate revenue. This is the presumed reason why institutions do not establish proper working agreements. Yet artists in Barcelona cannot depend on sales as their main income. The professionals that participated in this research depend almost 100% on private or public institutions commissions for producing an exhibition, workshop, performance, etc and not sales. And even with this income they do not have sufficient to fully make a living off their work. In order to survive artists often have another job or other sources of support. The public and private system does not offer enough resources for the current community to have a proper livelihood as an art professional. On the other hand we also have a legal system that does not favor it either. There is no specific legal and fiscal clauses designed specifically for their profession as we see in most European countries. In countries like Norway and Finland artists and other freelance professionals have what is called “flex-security” which is a specific social security system that guarantees a social and economic net for “flexible” professionals. It is urgent that these issues are addressed if we wish to have a vibrant, innovative and strong art sector in Barcelona. The art community needs support in order to grow and fully offer its true potentials. Art can emerge in the poorest and hardest conditions yet if we want to encourage its capacity to be a motor of social change and be a just and responsible society in relation to art it is crucial to give it support. A stable community can generate more ties with other spheres of society and also build its own voice. Unstable and precarious conditions lead to exceeding competition and to projects with less commitment due to the high level of multitasking art professionals must do to survive. An art context that does not offer possibilities to make a livelihood favors that only those with existing economic stability can become artists, curators, etc.... This factor reduces the diversity and social equality within the art context and is reflected in the ideas expressed through the art. Art has the capacity to imagine new scenarios and to inspire thinking “outside the box” only with a more stable situation can it deliver its full strength.

**The weaknesses of traditional models:** In the private sector there are very little models other than the traditional gallery. Galleries also appear to be in crisis. None of the participants of the research, even when represented by a gallery, are able to live with what they gain from sales in the gallery. We believe that there are new models to explore and that are already being experimented with. Art cooperatives such as La Fundició from Barcelona lean towards a service economy. La Fundició instead of presenting objects for sale such as classic art galleries they develop projects such as workshops and participative actions. These types of service orientated private models may be a solution to the crisis of the present private models. Art organizations and artists could find ways to offer their experimental and critical practices and views as services for private and public entities. This should not demand too much change in the artist practice itself. Many artists work in a similar fashion already at a freelance level. Simply changing the type of mediating and marketing of the projects can help the sector expand. These type of models work well with art practices that no longer deal only with esthetic issues yet also with conceptual ones. They focus on the idea of art as way to encourage reflexion and not as a simple object made for esthetic admiration. The current gallery system still emphasizes the idea of art as an precious object of desire and not so much as a tool to encourage thought. This notion of art as an object of simple desire and made for contemplation clashes with many art professionals own ideas. Many galleries in Barcelona are having difficulties in

finding buyers for the art they offer. My hypothesis is that the current gallery system is neither offering a product with sufficient economic and social demand nor adapting to what art professionals are producing.

**The scarce influence of cultural policies:** We have an un-fair or un-effective cultural economy and a cultural policy that is doing little to change it. Even though in Barcelona we are seeing small changes and initiatives that are slowly moving in new directions the intents are shy and we do have clear results. To see what changes are needed is not easy. Understanding how the current system works and what can be addressed by cultural policies is the first step. To change cultural policies and encourage new markets to emerge understanding how art professionals think and work is important. Increasing the budget in culture does not guarantee any problems to be solved. Yet there are actions that can be done that do not necessarily result in increasing public funding. Here are a series of actions that can be developed by cultural policies to promote minimum economic stability for art professionals by:

- Designing procedures to fund art projects better adapted to art professionals necessities (longer term grants).
- Enforcing structures do establish proper working conditions for art professionals.
- Designing or encouraging new models of institutions, organizations, etc. (cooperatives, etc.)
- Promoting awareness about art and it's dynamics, functions and benefits.
- Changing the legal premises related to art professionals working conditions.

**Government leaders unfamiliarity with art:** One of the main problem thought is that many government officials and technicians are unacquainted with the art world's necessities and internal dynamics. Local leader's unfamiliarity with the art scene is a real problem. As I have stressed over and over during this project, the actions taken by governments are usually contradictory with what the art scene truly needs and cares for. The current government has organized workshops and seminars for civil servants and local representatives to address the same problem in other sectors. This could be one of the actions that the government could take to begin with.

**Visibility and social understanding:** An important issue to be addressed is the place contemporary art has in society. Experimental, critical and innovative practices are often misunderstood or ignored my mainstream media and institutions. Bringing these practices closer to the generals publics understanding is important. As a result of this project the Network of independent art spaces of Barcelona has received an invitations by the Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA) to organize a roundtable about the independent scene. This is a good start to give voice and visibility to these small initiatives. MACBA has a much larger visibility than many of the spaces and it can serve as a window to reach out to a wider audience. Gaining public support for small initiatives is crucial for their survival gaining more public presence can be a way to do so. Exploring new ways to engage with other spheres of society is another line to investigate as well. Collaborations and public engagement also builds bridges for future connections and support.

**More opportunities for the art sector to debate about their current situation are needed:**

In order to find solutions for effective change, opportunities to elaborate and think collectively are needed. Realizing that frictions and difficulties are shared throughout a community is necessary to find possible answers. Situations to share these difficulties are required in order to do so. Again we



find that the economic and political system does not favor this type of collective thinking and communion. Individualism is encouraged not only in the art context yet in many other sectors of society at large (Putnam 1995). Time, space and ways to collectivize are not usually easy to find. In the art scene, symposiums and workshops, intend to address this need yet have little long term effects and substantial results. Connectivity is also produced by small informal conversations around activities and projects. Online social networks also encourage conversations and communication to emerge. Yet more concise, structured and organized actions are needed to adequately resolve this necessity for more connections and opportunities to meet. These actions must be flexible, dynamic and inspiring to encourage engagement and participation. These laboratories would offer opportunities for communities to construct and design together effective and sustainable solutions. This project in a certain sense tried to recreate this concept of laboratory. The project offered members of the art sector the possibility to take part in a coordinated setting to share ideas. The participatory action research method is very effective at building these type of settings. These actions should be envisioned as an investment for future projects, models, policies and economies. They would be a way to help local governments find solutions that respond to the local specificities and needs of the art sector. Encouraging these actions would strengthen the social output that art gives to a city. We should envision these labs as a type of workgroup dedicated in understanding, evaluation and articulating propositions of change. A group of active professionals committed in thinking together solutions for the art context in relation to the city as a whole. Future research could be directed towards designing these laboratories and articulating there internal dynamics and form of funding. As we mentioned earlier through this project the MACBA has invited the Network of Independent Art spaces to organize a debate about many f the issues discussed in this project. This can be a first step in creating this laboratory of ideas and debates.



*Illustration by Quim Packard*

## **6.2 Future research**

Possible future research would be to find how other cultural sectors and cities are dealing or have dealt with this breach as well as general precariousness within the sector. One interesting proposal we have found concerning the economic situation of art professionals is the Universal Basic Income or Basic Income Grant (BIG). Which consist in giving an income to cover basic needs all to members of society. The universal basic income grant (BIG) was mentioned various times during the work session of the research. This grant is being researched and tested by many organizations and the U.S Department of Arts and Culture (USDAC) advocates openly for this model. BIG according to the USDAC would guarantee not only economic stability for art professionals yet improve diversity and social awareness at a large scale (USDAC 2015). The research collective advocacy group for Universal Basic Income (BIG) has recollected and supported many experiments and studies. The most current experiment has been done in Uganda where BIG was applied in rural areas. The results have been so far very positive and encouraging. These initiatives have supporters from both sides of the political spectrum both right and left wing groups support the idea for different reasons. In Barcelona he online magazine *Nativa Indigestió* (*Nativa Indigestió* 2017) organized a debate about this issue specifically in relation to the cultural sector. Yet there is still few public debate about this subject. Opening a public debate about BIG could help learn more about its feasibility and advantages for the artistic context and as well as in other spheres. Organizing a conferences and talks at a small and large scale could be a way to do so. Inviting experts on the issue to talk in Universities or other organizations such as Museums, Art centers, etc. could help build awareness and interest about the

proposal. On social media and political press there is already quite a lot of dialog yet this could expand in more generalized media and platforms.

Developing a map of solutions could be attained through further research. Interviewing government officials in Barcelona and in other cities to see how are they directly perceiving the concerns we have traced in this research could be a start. Talking to different organized art professionals advocacy groups about what changes would they apply is also a route we have not talked here. A comparative between art workers incomes and conditions in different cities could also help see what variables have positive effects. In the city of Vlaanderen an intent to map out artist necessities is taking place through the organization Kuntsenpunt. The project is looking to grow and create a European network of similar participatory research projects. This could be an opportunity to compare the city of Barcelona with other city environments and learn from other case studies using a similar method we have implied in this research. Working through horizontal collective work-sessions and offering opportunities to bridge debates from different groups is the method we support the most. In future research I would like to elaborate a bottom-up research at an international level to compare and map-out ideas, debates and concerns in order to build guidelines for a more sustainable future. This research would be complemented with interviews and observations as mentioned earlier.

I believe that the project has offered a inside glimpse into a specific group of the art community in Barcelona in a committed and dynamic fashion. We have been able to share conversations and concerns with many individuals and organizations creating inspiring and fruitful connections for further projects. This has offered myself and the participants a very encouraging experience as well as a collective insight on the current situation of the scene. I hope that these encounters have provided the participants with ideas and new knowledge that can be useful for their own practice and to initiate new projects. I strongly believe that the connections formulated during this project will continue after the research is terminated. Taking advantage of existing momentums and interest has been key in order to make sure that the project was relevant not only for us yet also for the community we wished to engage with. Being aware of what were the debates that were already active was clearly beneficial for the project. I hope to continue this project both as research and as a tool for social transformation.

#### **6.4 Fireplace art organization**

Fireplace is an organization that has collaborated closely with the project as well as hosted the majority of our work sessions. It organizes exhibitions, concerts, talks, and workshops about contemporary art and offers workspace for artist and other professionals in the artistic field. It is part of the network of independent art space of Barcelona and has built a strong community around its events. The project is located in the area of Poblenou two blocks down from the beach and right next to the Rambla de Poblenou. In the last year it has been working to become more economically sustainable and depend less on volunteer work. During the research project the building where it is located has changed owners and the new owners wish to tear down the building in order to build vacation apartments. Even though Fireplace has a ten year rent contract the new owners are trying to find ways to evict Fireplace from its location. Even though the law protects renters and Fireplace can either stay or receive a compensatory fee for the eviction, the impacts on the neighborhood of such action on a larger scale have serious consequences. Projects like Fireplace even though bringing community value to the neighborhood have no way to resist this type of procedure. These issues at a wider standpoint affect not only the art community yet the whole dynamics of the city. It is an

example of how the economic and legal system favors certain activities more than others. This specific case relates to many of the concerns expressed during the work-sessions of the research. How can we find ways to guarantee a certain stability and sustainability for small projects like Fireplace? Looking at the larger picture as well as understanding these organizations better can help us do so.

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