

## Cultural commons as a key for bottom-linked policies. An exploration of the support for public and community partnerships in Barcelona.

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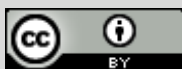
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## Abstract

This article aims to heighten our understanding of community managed cultural facilities, considering that these may be key for the future of cities. The research includes observant participation, thematic analysis of group debates and in-depth interviews with activists and professionals in the domain of community action in Barcelona. I document the construction of active collaboration networks of a wide variety of organizations fostering cultural commons in Barcelona, and highlight the efforts they have made to develop performance assessment tools. The conclusions consider the issue of mutual understanding between neighborhood movements, community action professionals, and the social economy sector. I underline how public-community partnerships can use networking activities to develop a constructive and critical approach to public service delivery and enhance collective learning about economic democratization. Vital importance is given to institutionalization of regulatory tools and the indicators needed to assess the value added by these partnerships.

Experiences of local development through the management of cultural spaces (Klein and Tremblay, 2020) drive us to question the role of self-organized community actors in fostering the democratization of everyday life. Actual cases of community empowerment and, specifically, the way it develops in those environments known as the urban commons and the cultural commons, have attracted interest from both academia and the policy domain around the globe (Antonucci 2020; Feinberg, Ghorbani, and Herder 2020, 2021; Giannini and Pirone 2019; Kay and Wood 2020; Petrescu et al. 2020; Shah and Garg 2017; Steiner, McMillan, and Hill O'Connor 2022; Williams 2018). In Barcelona, over the last decade, bookended by the effects of the Great Recession and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been growing recognition for the socially innovative potential of those spaces and cultural projects set up by communitarian platforms involving committed local residents as the managers of cultural practices; at the same time, these initiatives have also gained prestige among the general public.

As a particular manifestation of spaces of hope (Harvey 2000), community-led cultural centers are one specific subtype in the vast domain of urban commons where struggles are taking place to regain citizenship governance over water, food supply, energy distribution, housing or the public sphere, among others. As initiatives promoting cultural emancipation, collective learning and autonomous creation, these centers react against austerity policies and social vulnerability. Despite the wide diversity in their focal points, in their organizational formulas and in their scales of action, they coincide in that they act upon urban economies and social relationships to push for a general move toward democratization and decommodification. Thus, in addition to promoting cultural activities, many of these centers undertake initiatives that address a large number of current societal challenges. These are initiatives that envision the construction of other imaginaries of possibility.

In Barcelona, the development of different initiatives into a political movement, with its own particular platform of associations called Xarxa d'Espais Comunitaris (Network of Communitarian Spaces), is proof of the existence of a 'community-management' model for cultural facilities. The network includes initiatives with a wide variety of organizational forms, from okupa (squatters) social centers to officially recognized platforms that run public facilities under agreements with public administrations.

*... the forms of community-management are diverse (self-management of squatted or private spaces, management of municipal facilities and resources, cooperatives in rented premises, etc.) and are not based on a single model of work but are defined in a variety of ways that have to do with values, objectives and organizational models, in terms of the management of collective needs and their relationship with the shared resources of a given territory (Balanz Comunitari 2017-2020, Xarxa d'Espais Comunitaris).*

In this article, I support the idea that understanding this type of management of cultural

facilities may be vital in exposing how citizens can use specific demands, collective action and organizational proposals to gain the attention of policy makers and thereby claim their right to the city (Bailey and Marcucci 2013; Harvey 2014; Iveson 2013; Kemp, Lebuhr, and Rattner 2015; Novy and Colomb 2013). In this regard, this type of research includes an examination of bottom-linked initiatives as sites seeking complex equilibriums between institutionalization, community development and collective autonomy, and therefore it is essential for increasing knowledge on social innovation initiatives at the local level (Eizaguirre et al., 2012; Oosterlynck et al. 2013; Pradel, Eizaguirre, and García 2013). As for governance nodes for transforming cities and up-scaling their livability, the management of specific cultural facilities offers the opportunity to observe the limits and challenges of previous community development models that were influenced by neoliberal counter-reforms. The performance of these facilities as places where social struggles interact and where contributive democracy is put into practice is at the core of this research. But it also highlights the existence of other (or alternative) communitarian metrics than those related to enhancing individuals' social capital. With these aims, this study focuses on cultural management practices at a level close to citizens, involving them as creators and managers of cultural governance ecosystems, while rejecting the notion that their facilities are merely places for cultural consumption. At the same time, I give special attention to the relationship between these cultural environments and the realm of social economy, particularly the interactions between communitarian-led cultural management practices and forms of social economy.

**Keywords:** Community development, social innovation, public-community partnerships, cultural commons, Barcelona.

## Resum

Aquest article té com a objectiu comprendre la gestió comunitària d'equipaments culturals considerant que és clau per al futur de les ciutats. La investigació inclou observació participant, anàlisi temàtica de debats grupals i entrevistes en profunditat activistes i professionals de l'acció comunitària a Barcelona. Es documenta la construcció de xarxes de col·laboració d'una àmplia varietat d'organitzacions que fomenten els comuns culturals a Barcelona i es destaquen els esforços que han fet per desenvolupar eines per a l'avaluació de la seva pròpia activitat. Les conclusions destaquen la qüestió de l'entesa mútua entre els moviments veïnals, els professionals de l'acció comunitària i el sector de l'economia social. Se subratlla com els partenariats publicocomunitaris poden desenvolupar un enfocament constructiu i crític sobre la prestació de serveis públics i també són claus per millorar l'aprenentatge col·lectiu sobre els processos de democratització econòmica. En aquest sentit, al llarg del text s'atorga una importància vital a la institucionalització d'eines normatives i indicadors qualitius per avaluar el valor social i políticament transformador d'aquestes aliances.

Les experiències de desenvolupament local mitjançant la gestió d'espais culturals (Klein i Tremblay, 2020) ens interroguen sobre el paper dels actors comunitaris autoorganitzats en el foment de la democratització de la vida quotidiana. Els casos reals d'apoderament comunitari i, específicament, la manera com aquest es desenvolupa als entorns coneguts com a béns comuns urbans i/o béns comuns culturals, han atret l'interès tant de l'acadèmia com de l'àmbit polític a tot el món (Antonucci 2020 (Feinberg, Ghorbani i Herder 2020; Giannini i Pirone 2019; Kay i Wood 2020; Petrescu et al. 2020; Shah i Garg 2017; Steiner, McMillan i Hill O'Connor 2022; Williams 2018). A Barcelona, durant la darrera dècada, entre els efectes de la Gran Recessió, l'esclat de la pandèmia de COVID-19 i la crisi ecosocial desencadenada a continuació, s'ha anat reconeixent

amb cada cop més èmfasi el potencial social i políticament innovador d'aquells espais i projectes culturals impulsats per plataformes comunitàries en què participen ciutadans compromesos com a gestors de pràctiques culturals; alhora, aquestes iniciatives també han guanyat prestigi entre el públic en general.

Com una manifestació particular dels espais d'esperança (Harvey 2000), els centres culturals dirigits per la comunitat són un subtipus específic en el vast camp dels béns comuns urbans on s'estan duent a terme lluites per recuperar la governança ciutadana sobre l'aigua, el subministrament d'aliments, la distribució d'energia, l'habitatge o el medi ambient. Com a iniciatives promotores de l'emancipació cultural, l'aprenentatge col·lectiu i la creació autònoma, aquests centres reaccionen davant de les polítiques d'austeritat i dels processos de precarització social. Tot i la gran diversitat en els seus eixos, en les fórmules organitzatives i en les escales d'acció, coincideixen en que actuen sobre les economies urbanes i les relacions socials per impulsar la democratització i la desmercantilització. Així, a més de promoure activitats culturals, molts d'aquests centres desenvolupen iniciatives que donen resposta a un gran nombre de reptes de la societat actual. Són iniciatives que albiren la construcció d'altres imaginaris de possibilitat.

A Barcelona, el desenvolupament de diferents iniciatives en un moviment polític, amb la seva pròpia plataforma associativa particular anomenada Xarxa d'Espais Comunitaris, és prova de l'existència d'un model de gestió comunitària d'equipaments culturals. La xarxa inclou iniciatives amb una gran varietat de formes organitzatives, des de centres socials autogestionats inspirats pel moviment okupa, fins a plataformes reconegudes oficialment que gestionen equipaments públics en conveni amb les administracions públiques.

*... les formes de gestió comunitària són diverses (autogestió d'espais ocupats o privats, gestió d'equipaments i recursos municipals, cooperatives a locals llogats, etc.) i no es basen en un únic model de treball sinó que es defineixen en una varietat de maneres que tenen a veure amb valors, objectius i models organitzatius pel que fa a la gestió de les necessitats col·lectives i la seva relació amb els recursos compartits d'un determinat territori (Balanz Comunitari 2017-2020, Xarxa d'Espais Comunitaris).*

En aquest article es recolza la idea que aquest tipus de gestió dels equipaments culturals pot ser vital per entendre com la ciutadania articula demandes específiques, accions col·lectives i propostes organitzatives cridant l'atenció dels gestors i promotors de polítiques públiques i així reivindicant també el seu dret a la ciutat (Bailey i Marcucci 2013; Harvey 2014; Iveson 2013; Kemp, Leuhn i Rattner 2015; Novy i Colomb 2013). En aquest sentit, aquesta investigació examina les iniciatives de gestió cultural participada com a espais on es donen equilibris complexos entre la institucionalització, el desenvolupament comunitari i l'autonomia col·lectiva. Observar aquests equilibris és fonamental per entendre les iniciatives d'innovació social a nivell local (Eizaguirre et al. 2012; Oosterlynck et al. 2013; Pradel, Eizaguirre i García 2013). Pel que fa a la seva acció com a nodes de governança per transformar les ciutats i millorar-ne l'habitabilitat, la gestió participada d'equipaments culturals subratlla els límits i els reptes dels models de desenvolupament comunitari influenciats per les contrareformes neoliberals. L'actuació d'aquests equipaments com a llocs on interactuen les lluites socials i on es posa en pràctica la democràcia contributiva ocupa un lloc central d'aquesta investigació. També és rellevant l'existència de mètriques alternatives de tipus comunitari per avaluar l'acompliment dels equipaments culturals, diferents de les relacionades merament amb la millora del capital social dels individus. En resum, aquest estudi se centra en les pràctiques de gestió cultural a un nivell proper als ciutadans, involucrant-los com a creadors i gestors d'ecosistemes de governança democràtica, i rebutja la noció que els equipaments culturals són mers llocs de consum cultural. Alhora, l'estudi fa una atenció especial a la relació entre aquests entorns culturals i l'economia social, observant les interaccions entre les pràctiques de gestió cultural comunitària i les formes de l'economia social i solidària.

**Paraules clau:** desenvolupament comunitari, innovació social, partenariats publicocomunitaris, patrimoni cultural, Barcelona.

## Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo comprender la gestión comunitaria de equipamientos culturales considerando que es clave para el futuro de las ciudades. La investigación incluye observación participante, análisis temático de debates grupales y entrevistas en profundidad a activistas y profesionales de la acción comunitaria en Barcelona. Se documenta la construcción de redes de colaboración de una amplia variedad de organizaciones que fomentan los comunes culturales en Barcelona y se destaca los esfuerzos que han realizado para desarrollar herramientas para la evaluación de su desempeño. Las conclusiones destacan la cuestión del entendimiento mutuo entre los movimientos vecinales, los profesionales de la acción comunitaria y el sector de la economía social. Se subraya cómo los partenariados público-comunitarios pueden desarrollar un enfoque constructivo y crítico sobre la prestación de servicios públicos y son también claves para el aprendizaje colectivo sobre los procesos de democratización económica. En este sentido a lo largo del texto se otorga vital importancia a la institucionalización de herramientas normativas e indicadores cualitativos para evaluar el valor social y políticamente transformador de estas alianzas.

Las experiencias de desarrollo local a través de la gestión de espacios culturales (Klein y Tremblay, 2020) nos interrogan sobre el papel de los actores comunitarios autoorganizados en la democratización de la vida cotidiana. Los casos reales de empoderamiento comunitario y, específicamente, la forma en que se desarrolla en los entornos conocidos como bienes comunes urbanos y/o bienes comunes culturales, han atraído el interés tanto de la academia como del ámbito político en todo el mundo (Antonucci 2020; Feinberg, Ghorbani y Herder 2020; Giannini y Pirone 2019; Kay y Wood 2020; Petrescu et al. 2020; Shah y Garg 2017; Steiner, McMillan y Hill O'Connor 2022; Williams 2018). En Barcelona, durante la última década, entre los efectos de la Gran Recesión, el estallido de la pandemia de COVID-19 y la crisis ecosocial desencadenada a continuación, se ha ido reconociendo con cada vez más énfasis el potencial social y políticamente innovador de aquellos espacios y proyectos culturales impulsados por plataformas comunitarias en las que participan ciudadanos comprometidos como gestores de prácticas culturales; al mismo tiempo, estas iniciativas también han ganado prestigio entre el público en general.

Como una manifestación particular de los espacios de esperanza (Harvey 2000), los centros culturales dirigidos por la comunidad son un subtipo específico en el vasto campo de los bienes comunes urbanos donde se están llevando a cabo luchas para recuperar la gobernanza ciudadana sobre el agua, el suministro de alimentos, la distribución de energía, la vivienda o el medio ambiente. Como iniciativas promotoras de la emancipación cultural, el aprendizaje colectivo y la creación autónoma, estos centros reaccionan frente a las políticas de austeridad y los procesos de precarización social. A pesar de la gran diversidad en sus ejes, en sus fórmulas organizativas y en sus escalas de acción, coinciden en que actúan sobre las economías urbanas y las relaciones sociales con un movimiento general hacia la democratización y la desmercantilización. Así, además de promover actividades culturales, muchos de estos centros desarrollan iniciativas que dan respuesta a un gran número de retos de la sociedad actual. Son iniciativas que vislumbran la construcción de otros imaginarios de posibilidad.

En Barcelona, el desarrollo de diferentes iniciativas en un movimiento político, con su propia plataforma asociativa particular llamada Xarxa d'Espais Comunitaris (Red de Espacios Comunitarios), es prueba de la existencia de un modelo de gestión comunitaria de equipamientos culturales. La red incluye iniciativas con una gran variedad de formas organizativas, desde centros sociales autogestionados inspirados por el movimiento okupa, hasta plataformas reconocidas oficialmente que gestionan equipamientos públicos en convenio con las administraciones públicas.

*... las formas de gestión comunitaria son diversas (autogestión de espacios okupados o privados, gestión de equipamientos y recursos municipales, cooperativas en locales alquilados, etc.) y no se basan en un único modelo de trabajo sino que se definen en una*

*variedad de modos que tienen que ver con valores, objetivos y modelos organizativos, en cuanto a la gestión de las necesidades colectivas y su relación con los recursos compartidos de un determinado territorio (Balanç Comunitari 2017-2020, Xarxa d'Espais Comunitaris).*

En este artículo se apoya la idea de que comprender este tipo de gestión de los equipamientos culturales puede ser vital para entender cómo la ciudadanía articula demandas específicas, acciones colectivas y propuestas organizativas, llamando la atención de los gestores y promotores de políticas públicas y así reivindicando su derecho a la ciudad (Bailey y Marcucci 2013; Harvey 2014; Iveson 2013; Kemp, Lebuhn y Rattner 2015; Novy y Colomb 2013). En este sentido, esta investigación examina las iniciativas de gestión cultural participada como espacios en los que se dan equilibrios complejos entre la institucionalización, el desarrollo comunitario y la autonomía colectiva. Observar estos equilibrios es fundamental para entender las iniciativas de innovación social a nivel local (Eizaguirre et al. 2012; Oosterlynck et al. 2013; Pradel, Eizaguirre y García 2013). En cuanto a su acción como nodos de gobernanza para transformar las ciudades y mejorar su habitabilidad, la gestión participada de equipamientos culturales subraya los límites y desafíos de los modelos de desarrollo comunitario influenciados por las contrarreformas neoliberales. La actuación de estos equipamientos como lugares donde interactúan las luchas sociales y donde se pone en práctica la democracia contributiva ocupa un lugar central de esta investigación. También es relevante la existencia de métricas alternativas de tipo comunitario para evaluar el desempeño de los equipamientos culturales, diferentes a las relacionadas meramente con la mejora del capital social de los individuos. En resumen, este estudio se centra en las prácticas de gestión cultural a un nivel cercano a los ciudadanos, involucrándolos como creadores y gestores de ecosistemas de gobernanza democrática, rechazando que los equipamientos culturales sean meros lugares de consumo cultural. Al mismo tiempo, el estudio presta especial atención a la relación entre estos entornos culturales y la economía social, observando en particular las interacciones entre las prácticas de gestión cultural comunitaria y las formas de la economía social y solidaria.

**Palabras clave:** desarrollo comunitario, innovación social, partenariados público-comunitarios, patrimonio cultural, Barcelona.

## Objectives and structure of the article

The main objectives of the research are: 1) to show the tensions between the practices of community-based cultural management and the various forms of social economy; and 2) to analyze the relationships between public policies, community development and social economy by studying actual cases of communitarian management of cultural facilities in Barcelona. The article begins an overview of the current state of affairs that contextualizes the academic discussion on the territorial effects of community participation around cultural infrastructures, the relationship between social economy initiatives and cultural facilities, and how public policies favor cultural participation. Next, the research process is presented from a methodological perspective, with a reference to the data collection and analysis techniques used. The following section frames the Barcelona case studies in a context of sociopolitical opportunity that has promoted experimentation around communitarian forms of governance. The article then delves into critical aspects revealed by the research and analysis processes. It presents the results of the study in the form of insights which are proof of how the analyzed initiatives strengthen the criticism of the hierarchical provision of cultural services, contribute to a clearer definition of the objectives of economic democratization, and aid the development of new metrics to improve the public value of services management. The conclusions summarize the principal axes of tension between community action and solidarity economy, and the relationships between cultural management, social economy and democratization policies.

### *How things stand. Understanding the bottom-linked governance potential of cultural commons.*

The inquiry on community management applied to cultural initiatives tends to direct our attention to governance relationships, examining the critical components of a proper combination of state-provided facilities, communitarian involvement, and participative interaction with market-oriented actors. Thus, an important matter is what may be considered optimal interplay between citizen-led initiatives, cultural management activities and social and solidarity-based economic practices. To understand the bottom-linked potential of these alliances, this article presents three main areas of research: 1) the analysis of community participation around cultural facilities, with a focus on territorial development research; 2) the realm of social economy studies, with particular attention for the analysis of those social enterprises that work in close relationship to cultural facilities; and 3) the knowledge about public policies fostering cultural participation, and the crucial role of the state in supporting cultural rights through public-community partnerships.

### *The territorial effects of community participation around cultural facilities*

Several inquiries have been carried out, especially by territorial development research and cultural studies, on actions that may encourage a cultural activity to develop a mature dialog with the communities in its surrounding territory (Barbieri, Fina, and Subirats 2012; Brain 2019; González 2006; Klein, Angulo Baudin, and Tremblay 2017; Klein, Juan-Luis and Pecqueur 2017; Klein and Tremblay 2020; Martínez, Joaquim, and Ulldemolins 2012; Ribera-Fumaz 2009; Sánchez Belando 2015). In this line of research, reciprocity and those solidarity-based alliances that community initiatives establish around cultural facilities tend to be reported as sources of social capital. The construction of cultural communities in a territory has generally been described as a way of increasing individuals' social wealth in deprived and vulnerable urban areas. However, this might be an example of a limited neoliberal approach to neighborhood and community development (van den Berk-Clark and Pyles 2012; Loh and Shear 2015; Moulaert et al. 2010). An in-depth analysis of how we might consider and evaluate the intensity of the territorial rooting of cultural practices should go beyond a look at the simple objective of enhancing individuals' social capital in deprived territories (Marchioni 1999; Mayer 2003). It should frame questions on how the various economic, social, political and cultural conditions of regions may be improved by the activation of local communities and how this may lead to societal transformation. Civic capacity and social innovation dynamics are territorially embedded (van Dyck and van den Broeck 2013; Eizaguirre and Parés 2019; Parés, Blanco, and Fernández 2018), but hegemonic neoliberal neighborhood development approaches tend to restrict community development strategies to the enhancing of individual living conditions in socially excluded local areas. Understanding how structural conditioning affects communitarian cultural practices is particularly relevant, not only for the fight against inequalities between territories from a capability approach, but also for efforts to enhance the dynamics of social change by fostering networking ecosystems between different areas in the city. In addition, from an upscaling perspective, such insights are valuable for making progress on socioecological transition, degrowth futures and post-capitalist dynamics of collaboration between territories.

### *The relationship between social economy enterprises and cultural facilities*

The second area of research focuses on the dialog between cultural management activities and the social economy realm. Until recently, there has been a lack of awareness in policy making with regard to how social economy initiatives in the cultural domain deliver social returns and how their achievements can be assessed. This discussion is conditioned by the lack of a clear definition of what the social economy is (Nicholls, 2010). There are multiple examples of third sector cultural enterprises that work closely with the public administration to offer community-oriented activities. However, at the same time, many



of these are maintaining precarious labor conditions and enabling private appropriation of the benefits derived from the delivery of publicly funded cultural services and resources. This problem connects with the points that many social economy studies have made about the urgency of considering social economy organizations from a communitarian and an economic democratization perspective (Chang, 2012; Eizaguirre, 2021; Fraisse, 2013; Johanisova & Wolf, 2012). The corresponding body of literature looks at how social economy initiatives interact with community organizations and how they pursue broader sociopolitical objectives. These initiatives may or may not take community needs into consideration, but the main point made in the literature is that the need to run an activity according to business criteria does not necessarily imply an inability to respect communitarian projects.

The lack of attention for the dialog between community development and the multidimensional struggle for economic democratization, which is especially relevant in the precariousness and self-exploiting dynamics in entrepreneurial activities framed in the cultural domain, may also be explained by the influence of hegemonic neoliberal narratives on social economy paradigms (Chaves-Avila and Gallego-Bono 2020; Fontan 2011; Mailhot et al. 2021; Nicholls 2010). While the relevance of communitarian economies has not been ascertained in many cases, the literature does stress their importance from the perspective of many social economy approaches. The focus here is on understanding the existence of those non-market-oriented economies which may be labelled as communitarian economies, and observing their interaction with social enterprises which are typically only presented as market-oriented organizations that pursue socially inclusive aims. The interplay, challenges and tensions between them tend to be disregarded by mainstream narratives. Institutional narratives tend to disregard socio-communitarian organizations as meaningful players in the social economy. This is because even though these organizations do carry out economic activities, they do not place particular relevance on the market as a sphere of needs satisfaction. Especially in the domain of policymaking, there is a gap in knowledge and understanding of how different cultural economies and their different forms of participation, production, or distribution may foster a shared view. There are tensions between the economic culture promoted by socio-communitarian organizations, especially those more attached to their territorial context, and the economic culture at the core of socio-entrepreneurial organizations wishing to upscale their products and services. The socio-communitarian and solidarity economy sector itself is reflecting on what it means to place the attention and care for people, processes and the environment, among other societal challenges, in the center of their cultural and economic practices.

As a subtheme related to these matters, it should be noted that community-led cultural practices tend to express sharp criticism against the particular issue of capitalist interest in cultural industries and against the way this has affected the narratives on the economic

promotion of many big cities (Rius and Sánchez-Belando 2015; Sánchez Belando 2015, 2017; Zallo, 2005). Community-managed cultural initiatives highlight the transformative socioeconomic potential of cultural activities. They also strongly denounce the adoption of processes that are based on the promotion of the creative industries merely from a pro-growth perspective and that therefore lead to situations of vulnerability and precariousness in the cultural domain. Community-managed cultural organizations undertake activities that are more sustainable and transformative than those that are developed under other, aggressive ecosystems of cultural production driven by liberal economic attitudes.

### *Public policies to promote cultural participation*

Finally, the third area of inquiry in this research involves exploring how public policies may promote communitarian approaches to fostering cultural rights. This effort underlines the importance of analyzing democratic alliances built through this kind of experience. It involves examining how the expansion of communitarian approaches has furthered horizontal participation around cultural management practices and working out how this may be quantified and assessed from a public-value oriented perspective (Lévesque 2013). Social innovation studies, and in particular the branch centered on urban governance analysis, can draw on a specific body of literature which seeks to explain ways to foster public policies that are based on a communitarian approach that makes links to the social basis and is therefore labelled as the bottom-linked governance approach (Andersen K.; & Frandsen, M., 2013; García et al., 2015; a. Novy et al., 2012; Oosterlynck et al., 2013). The inquiry presented here connects directly with the specificities of an assessment of existing regulatory tools used to foster communitarian management of cultural affairs, and with the creation of new regulatory instruments to evaluate and quantify the positive outcomes of communitarian management. Various value-added metrics, which are mainly related to new municipalism policies, have been suggested and experimented with on initiatives known as public-communitarian and cooperative partnerships. (Blanco, Salazar, and Bianchi 2019; Chaves-Avila and Gallego-Bono 2020; Eizaguirre, Pradel and Garcia 2017; Russell 2019). It is a political step which opposes the 'old' neoliberal prescription of the New Public Management axiom for enhancing public-private partnerships when outsourcing facility management to private service providers. The challenges posed by such hybridization of the cooperative and communitarian forms of governance arrangements have attracted the interest of researchers who have carried out several experiments on the delivery of cultural policies (Castro, Fresnillo, and Moreno 2016; Martí-Costa and Castro-Coma 2016). The lessons derived may affect public policies which aim to foster public-communitarian and cooperative alliances in other policy domains that are not necessarily related to cultural rights. The regulatory tools and institutional responsibilities that are applicable in the field of culture may also impact other areas dedicated to defending

common goods. How this defense may be enhanced by the use and transformation of the public administration's normative codes and regulation mechanisms is a question that lies at the core of this research. How should we rethink the agendas on social rights (Zambrano 2019)? How can we make sure that cultural inequalities in partnership practices are made apparent (Barbieri, 2014, 2018)? In the end, we see that communitarian management of cultural projects that operates within the dynamics of public administrations is able to bring about changes. These changes are not only oriented toward the promotion of cultural democracy (Stevenson 2010) but they also aim to influence, as suggested above, the democratization of socioeconomic relationships, by fostering alliances of degrowth and taking on Eco societal challenges.

## Methodology

The methodology followed in this research responds to the features of autoethnography, also known as "insider ethnography" in the sense that it entails a more personal commitment than mere observant participation (Hayano, 1979). The interpretation of the data analyzed in this article is mainly based on my participation in several activities organized by the Xarxa d'Espais Comunitaris (Network of Communitarian Spaces) and the Xarxa d'Economia Solidària (Catalan Network of Solidarity Economy) in Catalonia between 2019 and 2022. However, the analysis also connects with my previous experience as an activist, especially between 2004 and 2007, when I was working in the core of a locally based communitarian platform that strived to energize a cultural facility in Barcelona. My activity in the two networks mentioned above does not represent a single experience, but rather a set of similar, locally based initiatives, and it is worth pointing out that this case study's focus on those two networks is motivated by the aim to describe social innovation dynamics as a collective learning process (Moulaert et al., 2010).

The quotes presented in this article have been taken from three group debates that were recorded, transcribed and analyzed with thematic analysis techniques. The participants in these events were mainly communitarian workers and activists involved in managing cultural projects.

The first of the three group debates, held at the end of 2020, was devoted to addressing the impact of the pandemic on the domain of community development, and counted on the participation of twenty communitarian workers from several cultural proximity centers in Barcelona. The objective was to address the stress endured by community-centered cultural facilities and cultural proximity facilities during the first phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges, dilemmas and contradictions that arose from their governance relationships with public policies were central to the debate. The participants, almost all of whom were professional workers in the communitarian domain, reflected on

the contradictions they had been suffering in comparison to other professionals of the social sector. Those contradictions concerned the restrictions and regulatory impositions arising from the exceptional nature of social and health measures and the response to the outbreak of the pandemic.

The two workshops that followed, both held in 2021, had comparatively lower numbers of participants. They were explicitly oriented toward understanding the relationships between community development, cultural management and socially transformative economic practices. One was set up in the framework of the Summer school of the Catalan Network of Solidarity Economy and aimed to understand the link between communitarian management and solidarity economies in the field of cultural practices. There were seven participants, who represented several community-led cultural centers in Barcelona. They were interviewed about three main topics: the relationship between their cultural revitalization initiatives and specific socio-entrepreneurial entities in the realm of the solidarity economy; the way that relationship was affected by the exceptional measures introduced during the pandemic; and the assessment of whether the pressure exerted by their combined initiatives was having a socio-political and regulatory impact on urban governance and institutional innovation.

The third group debate took place in the context of the Annual Encounter of the Catalan Network of Solidarity Economy and was marked by the participation of three social entrepreneurs specialized in initiatives in which community-based perspectives on the management of cultural commons are central. The three main topics were: the framing of the relationship between social economy initiatives and the defense of cultural commons; the discussion on the concept of communitarian economies; and the ways in which cultural centers orient themselves to respond to social needs and to guarantee territorial sustainability. Particular attention was given to the practicalities, challenges and contradictions arising from the market-oriented perspective of social economy initiatives in community development. Finally, two matters of deep concern about the future law on Social and Solidarity Economy were also debated: the approach the Parliament of Catalonia was taking toward approval of the bill, and the degree to which the bill addressed the particular circumstances of communitarian economies.

The insights derived from these activities have been complemented by the knowledge I gained through engaged participation as an active member of a working commission of the Catalan Network of Solidarity Economy of Catalonia. Between 2019 and 2022, I was in direct contact with the object of study through my involvement in a book-publishing project and a co-constructive process-oriented initiative to define a training module on community-led cultural centers. The publishing project was carried out over 2020 and 2021, and as the co-editor, I was in charge of efforts to create a jointly-authored book with contributions by twenty representatives of community-led cultural initiatives in various

locations in Catalonia (Eizaguirre and Rodrigo, 2022). Their writings are monographs that focus on the topic under discussion here. The activities connected with editing and providing guidance for the publication have also informed many of the syntheses presented here. In this research, I have triangulated the publishing project with the thematic analysis of the three group debates and my previous personal experience as a member of an active platform seeking a public-communitarian partnership. The overall methodological strategy of the work presented here connects personal experiences with a socio-historical reality, and makes it possible to avoid some autoethnographic risks, such as an excessive focus on the researcher's individual experience or an emphasis on the narration rather than the sociological analysis.

### **Barcelona as a lab for communitarian development of new forms of urban governance.**

During the last decade, the reality of collective learning as to the management of cultural facilities in Barcelona attracted institutional attention, especially following the election of the Barcelona en Comú platform to the City Council in 2015. Official action plans seeking to foster locally developed forms of urban governance accorded recognition to several citizen-run organizations that were pressing for the introduction of collaborative management dynamics around cultural facilities. To explain this type of public and communitarian alliance, it is worth noting that the acknowledgement — by both civil society and the administrations — of cultural centers as crucial tools for social transformation increased markedly between the Great Recession and the aftermath of the Spanish 15-M anti-austerity movement in 2011. An illustration of this is the birth of the organization known as the Barcelona Platform for Citizen Management: the very first move was a meeting held in 2009, and the public announcement of its launch took place in 2012 (Capdevila, 2022)<sup>1</sup>. The findings of this research support the idea that the political lobby organized by the movement of community-led cultural centers has paved the way for change in governmentality by abandoning the previously used neoliberal approaches to building urban social cohesion which relied on the 'outsourcing' of cultural provision.

The realization that community development can be understood and fostered in terms of cultural access, and is related to building collective multilevel alliances and local autonomy practices, connects current citizen-led cultural sites in Barcelona with knowledge about urban social movements in the eighties (Castells 1983). In addition, in a historical approach to citizen revitalization of proximity cultural facilities in Barcelona, an essential reference

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1. One of the first documents of the Platform for Citizen Management, dated 2012, was used to present the Platform to the public. At that point, the platform was made up of 17 entities that managed 21 projects at various locations in the city; by 2021, it had more than doubled in size and consisted of 40 promoters of 48 facilities and community services for citizen management in the city (Capdevila, 2022).

is knowledge of 19th-century democratic cooperativism. As Estivill and Miró (2021) have shown, we may find many references to previous experiences rooted in the 19th-century struggle of the workers' movement and the tradition of autonomous, self-organized mutual societies and cooperatives, which consider cultural activity with a holistic and politically oriented empowerment approach (Estivill & Miró, 2021). From the perspective of social economy history, Miró refers to those historical organized labor movements as antecedents of contemporary expressions of socialization forms in community-led cultural centers (Miró, 2018). Since the end of the 19th century, the cultural practices in popular and workers' cultural societies have been vital in explaining Catalonia's history of community and cooperative traditions. Those practices are class-based and concern specific aesthetic, musical, theatrical or educational projects, and promote the inspiring values of cooperative identity: mutual help, democratic self-responsibility, equality, equity, and solidarity.

After the Franco regime (1939–1975) had totally eradicated associative practices all across Catalonia, cultural activity slowly recovered around some entities and spaces that had housed consumer cooperatives. First, there was a timid restart in the form of the recovery of cultural infrastructures in those locations where consumer cooperatives had previously operated. These initiatives generally involved specific architectural renovations of old industrial facilities. With varying degrees of public intervention, many were adapted as spaces for cultural exhibitions and events such as theatre, music, dance and cinema or as cultural facilities such as libraries and community centers. Miró (2022) suggests that, in line with their historical context, these recovery operations were following the mandates of individualistic cultural consumerism (Miró 2022). The interaction that gradually arose, especially from the late 1960s and early 1970s, between these spaces and various social organizations in the cultural field, began to open up new opportunities for the reappropriation of culture with a holistic perspective. The shift also underlined differences between institutionalized cultural practices and community-managed ones.

During the Transition to democracy, developments continued along two lines. On the one hand, there were the official cultural spaces which served as institutionalized locations for culture (mainly libraries, theaters and community centers). They formed a network of local cultural facilities and were championed as providers of equity through a 'minimum cultural wage'. Cultural proximity services, delivered under the social-democratic principle of territorial redistribution, were identified as one of the democratic gains for many deprived urban areas. They took shape in a network of community centers, libraries and other cultural facilities that were managed with a top-down vision, programmed and directed by public institutions. On the other hand, there was the autonomous and self-managed culture movement which represented the antagonistic resistance. Self-managed social centers in squatted buildings, libertarian cultural societies and pro-Catalan independence houses can be presented as examples of what Miró has labelled "integral laboratories of

assembly and emancipation". Miró (2022) highlights them as engines of cultural vitality, that give birth to transformative social ways of experiencing neighborhoods and cities with a communitarian and critical vision of the social reproduction of culture.

All in all, Barcelona has a solid reputation as a reference for creativity and for the relatively effective struggle of its local social movements. During the 1980s, these movements were especially active, making urgent demands for the social redistribution referred to above through proximity facilities (Andreu, 2015; Huertas, 1997). Their activity has led to the recognition of a social-democratic urbanism that has legitimized and capitalized on local movements' efforts through the well-diffused narrative of the 'Barcelona model' (Capel 2005). This model, with its urban, social democratic and redistributive perspective, marked the decentralized provision of cultural facilities as an effective measure to boost social cohesion, especially in segregated, deprived and peripheral neighborhoods. The emphasis on proximity and decentralized approaches was accompanied by discourse that presented the city government as committed to enhancing citizen-managed practices (García 2006). However, these maneuvers have been sharply criticized by Delgado (Delgado 2007; UTE 2004) and others who coined terms such as citizenism to describe an institutional narrative designed to highlight decentralization, citizen participation and socially innovative dynamics, but which, at the same time, did not come along with actual structural socioeconomic reforms (Charnock, March, and Ribera-Fumaz 2021:594). Following the search for a virtuous combination of economic growth and a certain degree of urban social cohesion (Kearns and Forrest 2000), Barcelona can be presented as a paradigmatic example of a city where an urban governance policy combines co-constructive narratives on participation policies with neoliberal economic policies that are oriented towards fostering business as usual and seeing the city as a growth machine (Molotch 1976). As a result, while the deployment of an ambitious scheme for the provision of 'community centers' has largely been successful, the overall social democratic and renewed left-liberal institutional narrative on urban governance has also drawn increasingly sharp criticism from circles which take the perspective of urban social movements.

### Examining isolated top-down approaches to the provision of culture using the complexities of communitarian management as a parameter.

The de-politicization of neighborhood movements and the co-optation of influential activists into the institutional architecture of local administrations were experienced as problematic phenomena correlated with the expansion of cultural proximity facilities during the 1980s. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, the deployment of community centers occurred in parallel with a loss of civic muscle and a transfer of brainpower from neighborhood movements to public administrations. As Pieres (2022) points out, many cultural associations that had seen a rebirth of popular and



Ateneu popular. The Ateneu Popular 9 Barris is a public socio-cultural centre that operates according to the community management model. It was born in 1977 from the neighbourhood occupation of an asphalt plant that was built between the neighbourhoods of Roquetes and Trinitat Nova. Recovering the idea of culture, intervention and links with the territory, it is committed to being a project that contributes to social transformation. The axes of the project are production and training in circus, programming and cultural dissemination and work with the territory. (©POLIS Reserach Centre)

neighborhood culture during the Transition, were threatened with a loss of political meaning and a progressive weakening of their communitarian approaches to organizing things. Human decapitalization and the co-optation of many activists into professional roles in public administration bodies were particularly intense during the 1980s. They occurred in parallel with the re-shaping of cultural societies, clubs and cultural centers into places that merely programmed cultural activities, depoliticizing their objectives. The process was also linked to the public administration’s increasing involvement in the management of cultural affairs and to its deployment of related public services. In this research, the processes taking place today are described from the perspective taken by Pieres, emphasizing the distancing of the third cultural sector from social economy initiatives and democratic cooperatives. In this regard, cultural activists have experienced the developments as a politically induced process of disengagement and as a reduction of awareness of the economic impact of cultural activities (Pieres 2022).

While the process of disengagement during the 1980s was widespread, there were also notable exceptions. The Ateneu Popular de 9 Barris — a cultural society that has been active since the early 1970s — may be considered an isolated case of success of the practice of





Library in Trinitat Vella – José Barbero . 2012 It is the work of the municipal architects Ricardo Nieves and Carlos Fuentes and the PCG office. It specialises in social movements and is designed as a three-storey building for various library uses. The library is called the Trinitat Vella Library - J. Barbero. José Barbero (Granada, 1945- Barcelona, 2009), known as “the watchmaker”, tireless fighter and member of the Neighbourhood Association who died suddenly in 2009. His fight for the neighbourhood and for the rights of the residents of La Trinitat Vella marked his daily life. A noteworthy part of the library’s electricity consumption comes from a photovoltaic intervention on a party wall just behind the building.(©POLIS Reserach Centre)

collective, self-managed cultural facilities with clear involvement by the **local** community (Tudela 2022). During the last three decades, in the management of cultural proximity facilities, it has been standard practice to apply a top-down approach to decentralized and outsourced provision of culture. In almost all cultural proximity facilities, provisioning has been contracted out to specialized private companies operating in the field of cultural services, with many presenting themselves as third sector enterprises by virtue of the social and cultural nature of their services. Since this trend started, it has nourished the awareness, in particular areas of the city, and also especially among prominent social activists, of the disconnection between ongoing social movements and a technical and professionalized approach to cultural revitalization. And while the development of cultural facilities was set in motion by the municipal authorities, it is now driven by relatively large specialized private companies devoted to the provision of cultural services (Font, J., Ojeda, H., Urbano 2015). As a result, today, among specialized actors and community workers in the domain of culture, the idea has emerged that there should be alternative forms of running cultural proximity centers. There should be alternative methodologies



Community Centre Bon Pastor. On the site of the old "Centro Blanco" (White Center), a chapel built in 1932 by the municipal architect of Santa Coloma de Gramenet, Joseph Alemany, in the middle of the housing estate built by Enric Sanchís for his workers. It later housed the "Popular Athenaeum" and, from 1940 onwards, had various charitable uses until the 1970s, when it became the headquarters of the Asociación de Cabezas de Familia (Family Heads Association) and later the Asociación de Vecinos del Bon Pastor (Bon Pastor Neighbourhood Association). In 1976, the City Council evicted the Neighbourhood Association from the building, which was later demolished and years later, in 1988, the City Council built the current Community Centre of the neighbourhood. They remodeled it between 2014 and 2015. Initially, it had a climbing wall now deactivated. (©POLIS Reserach Centre)

that pay particular attention to the needs and circumstances of those social groups that suffer the highest levels of exclusion. And criticism to top-down approaches is readily voiced in assessments of the functioning of cultural facilities.

*You often must pass too many filters to enter a community center. There are people who ask you if you are going to the workshop. If you are going to this place, that place, or somewhere else. In contrast, we have found that our space is very different, especially in cases of undocumented immigrants and persons with mental health issues. It is a place where good facilities have been set up. During the time we have been active, since 2013, we have been using community management, and we have had fascinating experiences with it. We are always talking about a triangle of autonomy, responsibility, and commitment. (AA – community center worker)*

Another vital matter to explain is how community-led cultural centers define their critical role in opposition to the official and outsourced provision of cultural services. Two factors



The “Lleialtat Santsenca” was a workers’ cooperative founded at the end of the 19th century, created by the residents of the Barcelona neighbourhood of Sants to confront the abuses of the shops in the area. The aim was to obtain food at a cheaper price, for the benefit of all the members. Over time, the cooperative got sufficient resources to erect its building, the work of Josep Alemany y Jive, the architect of the façade of the Molino in Poble Sec. After the Civil War, the building was expropriated, and the cooperative reopened in 1941 under the supervision of the Falange. In 1950, it closed and from then on, it had various uses. After a period of abandonment, different collectives promoted the recovery of this emblematic building for the neighbourhood, with a project by H Arquitectes. (©POLIS Reserach Centre)

are relevant to this question: cultural centers’ path-dependency which arises from the memories and experiences of the neighborhood movement where they emerge, and the collective learning dynamic that centers tend to construct with other similar or complementary initiatives. Based on a critical approach to top-down cultural provision, those neighborhoods that are more vital and dynamic from a socio-communitarian point of view — of which Sants is a clear example — have been experimenting with hybrid forms of management involving civil society representatives, public providers and third parties which engage in market-oriented social economy activities. This experimentation builds on a firm commitment to network governance that counteracts isolated neoliberal approaches to community building. It is a reaction against top-down approaches, which tend to take the provision of cultural facilities as specific interventions necessary to satisfy the needs of those territories seen as empty deserts when it comes to social relationships.

In this regard, the differences between neighborhoods are enormous. While many have not had stimulating experiences, in Sants the situation is quite the opposite. Within the



Can Batlló. In 1878 Joan Batlló bought some land in La Bordeta on the Can Mangala estate, next to the Canal de la Infanta. This is the origin of Can Batlló, a factory where thousands of residents of La Bordeta worked. In the 1970s-1980s, the Can Batlló Platform emerged to demand the transformation of the Can Batlló site, that according to the General Metropolitan Plan of 1976, should be converted into a green area and facilities for the neighbourhood. The Platform was reactivated in 2009 after some years of latency. They activated the transformation of the Can Batlló site in June 2011, with the neighbourhood's entry into the site. The first building to be completed was Block Eleven. Its refurbishment, carried out through collective work days, lasted over two years. The first space fitted out was the Josep Pons Popular Library. Subsequently, a bar and meeting space, an auditorium, a climbing wall and several multi-purpose rooms for activities and workshops have been refurbished. Over the years, more spaces have been transformed and new uses have been added: the infrastructure workshop, the carpentry workshop, the collective print shop, the documentation centre, the family space, the arts space. Other projects that form part of the Platform, which have a longer and more far-reaching scope, are the La Borda housing cooperative, the Coòpolis cooperative nursery and the Arcàdia school. (©POLIS Reserach Centre)

context of Barcelona, Sants is unique in that it has a rich history of popular self-organization. It is home to a significant concentration of experiences of community management that may be presented as excellent examples of joint efforts toward building bottom-up grassroots movements and local networks with an all-embracing view on development which transcends cultural provision on the basis of neoliberal principles. Initiatives and facilities such as the two community centers Espai Comunitari i Veïnal Autogestionat de Can Batlló (2011) and Lleialtat Santsenca (2018) are representative of a new series of experiments in the field of community-managed cultural centers. They are dedicated to developing socially innovative ways of meeting social needs, and build on a long and outstanding tradition of working class self-organization institutions (Eizaguirre and Parés 2019). At this point, I should add that the management formulas followed today in



Can Vies. The Centro Social Autogestionado (CSA), Can Vies, is a squatted self-managed social centre that has existed since 1997. It is located in the Sants neighbourhood of Barcelona. The building where it is located was built in 1879 as a dwelling, remodelled by the construction of the Transversal metro line in Barcelona, as it is next to the Mercat Nou station on line 1 of the Metro. In 1984 the CNT (National Confederation of Labour) trade union asked TMB (Transports Metropolitans de Barcelona) for premises for its activities, and so officially it is the trade union that uses the premises. It is currently a squatted space where all kinds of cultural, social and political activities are held. (©POLIS Reserach Centre)

organizations such as those highlighted above cannot be explained without considering previous codes for management used in this neighborhood and their historical context. It is also interesting to gain insight into the agreements and shortcomings that existed, and the experiences that were gained, in the interactions between the neighborhood movement and the municipal administration in similar cultural facilities in Sants, such as Cabinet d'Hostafrancs or Cotxeres de Sants.

Those two facilities are good examples of places where previous valuable experiences around co-management formulas were gained. Consequently, those experiences played an essential role in defining what the Sants neighborhood movements have aimed to



The civic centre of Casa Orlandai, in the Sarrià district of Barcelona, is another very different example of an initiative promoting community management with the aim of social transformation. The Sarrià-Sant Gervasi district in Barcelona is historically associated with the highest purchasing power indicators in the city. Sarrià is an old suburb annexed to Barcelona in 1921, around which other residential areas have developed. The whole district has a population favoured in salary terms compared to the rest of the city. Nevertheless, Sarrià retains a mixed socio-demographic composition. Due to its nature as an ancient village, it has a very active socio-cultural and associative fabric. Working middle classes, historically associated with manual or artisanal trades, and the new middle class, linked to the presence of people exercising liberal professions and established more recently live there. © Clara Drudis. 15th anniversary of Casa Orlandai, 2022. Image provided by the Casa Orlandai Cultural Association

achieve (and the points they have rejected) in more recent projects, such as Can Batlló and La Lleialtat. In addition to these, it is worth noting the lessons learnt on autonomous urban governance around landmark experiences of the autonomous squatters movement, such as the CSO La Hamsa or Can Vies, both located in Sants neighborhood. A final source of locally gained knowledge has to do with the association that promotes the cooperative and communitarian economy in the neighborhood, Impuls Cooperatiu de Sants. This is particularly relevant because local initiatives to foster the social economy have led to an awareness among civil associations of the need to complement their activities with a market-oriented third party. In doing so, they realize that a cooperative initiative does not necessarily pursue democratic development, and therefore they seek collaboration with



The experience of the Casa Orlandai cultural centre can be analyzed as an example of the dynamics of community articulation in a territory affected by gentrification. This dynamic was organized around a project of popular appropriation of a disused space. The building of heritage interest that the cultural centre currently occupies was a public primary school during the second half of the twentieth century. When the school moved to more suitable premises, a neighbourhood citizen platform and some political and technical leaders from the Sarrià-Sant Gervasi district worked to give it a new use. The rehabilitation of the building intended to become a civic centre began in 2006. © Clara Drudis. 15th anniversary of Casa Orlandai, 2022. Image provided by the Casa Orlandai Cultural Association

the democratic cooperativism movement. Today, facilities such as Can Batlló or Lleialtat in Sants combine a communitarian approach to local development with governance arrangements negotiated with the city council, while seeking active involvement of social economy initiatives committed to democratic economic development.

### Deepening the relationship between management of culture, social economy initiatives and democratization aims.

As pointed out in the previous section, the realms of community action and the solidarity economy, although related, do not have a systematic and unambiguous relationship. This can be observed in social economy initiatives which employ cultural management practices without considering the aims of community empowerment and economic

democratization. Between 2017 and 2020, an assessment tool was developed to address this particular challenge. The Community Balance Sheet is managed by the Network of Communitarian Spaces with support provided by the Citizen Assets Programme of Barcelona City Council. The objective was to have a tool that makes use of the analysis of specific experiences of cultural revitalization which are related to social and solidarity-based economic activities that place particular value on community empowerment. The Community Balance Sheet is based on an inventory of concrete local initiatives in the sphere of the solidarity economy that have fostered communitarian perspectives in cultural management practices and vice versa. It also builds on an examination of community-led cultural platforms that have promoted the integration of social economy initiatives in their core functioning. Using the analysis of successful cases as a starting point, the Network of Communitarian Spaces has promoted knowledge about community action as an essential part of the political positioning of those socioeconomic organizations that seek to be included in the framework of the social and solidarity-based economy and want to commit themselves to fostering economic democratization. The development of the Community Balance Sheet entailed a process of collective definition of a series of indicators for the values and methodologies inherent to community management of cultural facilities. As a result, the solidarity-based economic sector now has an evaluation mechanism for organizations to assess aspects of internal governance, commitment to the environment of civil associations, financial return, and social impact of their activities. The communitarian perspective, in particular with regard to the management of cultural practices, implies a way of doing things that visualizes the effects of an economic activity on community-development. These effects can be internal, related to how initiatives undertake their own organization, and external, related to the quality of their networks and relationships with other initiatives.

*We started to use the Community Balance Sheet to have some parameters to evaluate our performance. One of them is democracy and participation. The axis of democracy and participation has a lot to do with balancing the professional and the activist because, from the start, the professional spends much more time here than anyone else, has much more information, and therefore has much more informal power. You need to have very tight structures where you formally make decisions, and which the person holding all the informal power is subject to. And this means you have to take very good care of the decision-making processes. If those tight structures are not in place, the informal power readily ends up taking over and setting the guidelines. What happens when the informal power — the paid worker — does not properly take into account the processes it works with? Since the worker is here all day long, there is no need to see ill will as an explanation for this. What happens is simply this: if your work rhythm does not bear in mind that there are people who do not spend the whole day here, if your needs and haste to resolve and settle matters, and your productivity around cultural issues mean you do not take into account that the pace of other people involved is slower, you will end up being left alone. This is because no*



*one can keep up with you, and on top of that, no one feels they are being cared for or that they can in some way have an impact on what they do. And when you don't have an impact on what you do when you participate, you stop participating. (MS – former worker, now activist.)*

The definition of indicators to be used in the Community Balance Sheet has also resulted in efforts to address the difficulties and challenges of many socioeconomic initiatives in incorporating the community dimension into their activities. According to a study by Lite, there are many initiatives in the social economy realm that fail to see and understand their communitarian impact, simply because they do not engage in any activities related to communitarian empowerment (Lite 2022). The Community Balance Sheets also exposes socio-communitarian organizations to the diversity of existing initiatives and, thereby, to the wide range of casuistry, conditions, and possibilities. This then serves to heighten their understanding of both the challenges in their internal governance — illustrated in the quote above — and the conditions of the social and solidarity market they operate in. Finally, it is worth noting that the Network of Communitarian Spaces has established itself as a sector-focused commission of the Catalan Network of Solidarity Economy, with the aim of fostering strong, new relationships between community development actors and the social economy domain. Within this organizational alignment special attention is given to the viewpoints of social economy initiatives because they are organizations that are likely to consider the Community Balance Sheet as an important tool, and may even benefit from using it. Although the Network's efforts may be geared toward many socio-entrepreneurial activities, they mainly focus on those social and solidarity economy organizations that are specifically devoted to community development and that may need to formulate a code of conduct to guide their interactions with socio-communitarian organizations.

The knowledge around the Community Balance Sheet has also been used to shape public policy making. From 2021, in parallel with the gradual relaxing of the rules on physical contact during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Network of Communitarian Spaces returned to striving hard for the regulatory and legal recognition of particular achievements of community-managed organizations. These efforts include pedagogical activities in addition to the ongoing political pressure for the proper recognition of public-community partnerships in the management of cultural affairs. A primary concern is the dissemination of the conceptual systematization of the advantages of community management, especially in the case of cultural resources and services.

Along with securing political support for the indicators mentioned above, interacting with cooperative projects and businesses that do community work is an essential function of the Network of Communitarian Spaces. Through this interaction, the Network aims to acquire knowledge and set up alliances based on the concrete conditions under which social entrepreneurial initiatives could take over the central role of communities while

developing community work. This is a delicate question because it requires understanding what social innovation studies have highlighted about the widely varying civic capacities of different neighborhoods, while also considering how enterprises operating in the social and solidarity economy can contribute to community building — independently from the official channels — by enhancing communitarian self-rule and civic capacity. This research shows that the social economy realm has been recognized as a market-oriented actor that needs to be provided with crucial insights on how to do business while considering local communities and being at their service.

*These social and solidarity economy organizations often work under contracts with the public administration and typically share some of the objectives set by that administration, and, if you look closely, you will see that they link their activities to the bottom in a top-down fashion. If we are to participate actively in alliances with these organizations, it is crucial they take on a role in which they develop their engagement with the community. And if that means their mission is tarnished and disconfigured, and requires redefining — this time focusing on the needs of communities — well, so be it. When communities are very clear about what they want and need and when they are willing and able to act, the moment will arrive for facilitator organizations to, ideally, pull out, if the community so desires, or start working for the community, rather than for the public administration. (MS – former community center employee, now activist.)*

## New metrics to enhance the assessment of public value of management systems

Public, community and cooperative partnerships may be considered organizational governance arrangements oriented by a public value-added perspective in the ways that social innovative dynamics in public management systems require nowadays (Lévesque 2013). As a particular governance arrangement, a partnership needs institutional recognition and clear regulatory protection supported by concrete evaluable metrics that public managers may use to defend the social benefits of community management as opposed to the shortcomings of private-public partnerships. It is worth stating that in the previous decades in Barcelona, there was a very high level of integration of private capital in the institutional architecture through public-private partnerships and this has greatly affected governmental institutional inertias. The widespread practice of outsourcing work to private companies has meant losing control of the management of public infrastructure and the establishment of specific official ways of functioning that are dominated by a neoliberal approach to assessing service-provision on the basis of cost appraisals. However, as mentioned above, the structure of political opportunity changed in 2015 when a new wave of municipal policies was ushered in. The new outlook aimed to reduce the number of public-private partnerships by considering other performance indicators than those whose rational basis is a simple calculation of costs (Eizaguirre, Pradel and García 2017).



Although the city council financed the rehabilitation of the civic centre and committed to funding the activities that would take place there, the centre is managed by the "Associació Cultural Casa Orlandai" (made up of around twenty associations in the district). In the spring of 2007, Casa Orlandai opened its doors to the public. It works from citizen management based on a legal formula recognized by the municipal administration. At that time, it could be considered a new way of approaching the collaboration between the town hall and a citizen platform, although it was gradually institutionalized. © Unknown author. Festa Major de Sarrià, 2008. Image provided by the Casa Orlandai Cultural Association.

An essential feature of the efforts to support the change in policy is the Citizen Assets Programme, which was developed and promoted by the Barcelona City Council with the support of the culture and community sector. The program has specifically focused on studying and enhancing the relationship between local institutions and community management practices, incorporating new forms of cooperation and new performance indicators, which are not based on the 'business-as-usual' logic for providing resources and services, but on reasons related to social responsibility, proximity, preservation of communities and restoration and recovery of local resources<sup>2</sup>. The Citizen Assets

2. Taking up the ideas of Forné and Castro (2022), this policy gives relevance to two instruments for measuring and evaluating public value. The rationale behind both tools make use of novel community-oriented metrics to bring other issues of public interest to the fore. The Community Balance Sheet rejects mercantilist logic, and seeks to generate new languages to express community value with qualitative and quantitative indicators. The Calculation of Social Return serves to translate the 'costs and benefits' of community-management practices into accounting and monetary terms (Forné and Castro 2022).



Casa Orlandai revolves around an assembly, a board of directors, and committees coordinating the centre's activities. The general group and the board of directors are the bodies that manage the entity. Commissions are also set up to provide the centre with spaces for participants to manage different aspects or activities of the centre. The Casa Orlandai Cultural Association has also worked, since 2014, the Espai Gardenyes, a space comprising a vegetable garden, an agora and a bioconstruction project. This space, adjacent to the location of the cultural centre, was developed as part of the Pla de Buits Urbans de l'Ajuntament de Barcelona (Barcelona City Council's wasteland plan). This program relies on temporarily using solar buildings that have become vacant in the context of the economic crisis. © Unknown author. Spring Festival, 2019. Image provided by the Casa Orlandai Cultural Association.

Programme for Community Use and Management is the first public policy developed in Barcelona to promote and develop institutions managed under a public-community model through the transfer of municipal assets and public service management to local communities (Castro, Fresnillo, and Moreno 2016).

### Conclusion: The communitarian approach to cultural management as a socially transformative tool

Community-led cultural facilities, as schools of democracy, are gaining importance for the future of cities because they serve to build resilient, safe, sustainable, and inclusive urban communities in a very significant way. Cultural centers, especially those that are self-managed and oriented towards the construction of community alliances, are spaces in which reciprocity, partnerships, communication, and mutual respect are put into practice in a very accessible way and on a day-to-day basis. They aim to rediscover mutuality, reciprocity, associational interaction, multi-vocal forms of communication and shared decision-making dynamics. All these elements are vital assets in a context where community resilience and the strengthening of social bonds between groups and individuals have become matters of mounting concern not only for the most deprived and excluded communities, but also for a broader range of social groups. In today's world, where scarcity and social conflicts are increasing, and where we are facing socio-ecological challenges posed by multiple crises, civic capacity for self-organization and community autonomy has become an objective for many other groups beyond those socio-political movements that have traditionally been sympathetic to local self-governing. In the response to a possible, more severe systemic crisis, the introduction of political empowerment and economic democratization in the management of cultural facilities may act as a potent driver for building community resilience. Communities that foster democratic governance use self-managed spaces as meeting locations dedicated to promoting cultural empowerment through educational and artistic activities. However, it is crucial to consider the existence of a significant variability among the initiatives in these spaces. Cities are vibrant places which are home to local cultural ecosystems that operate under a co-constructive bottom-linked approach, but their survival depends on complex equilibriums and they are not evenly distributed in the urban space. Community-led cultural spaces always vary in their formal institutionalization within public bodies, in their critical approaches to public policies, or in their views on organizational autonomy.

On the other hand, they tend to coincide in their goals regarding democratization as a collective learning process. In this regard, a key insight — as pointed out in social innovation studies and territorial development research — is that dynamics of self-organization, and therefore dynamics of community participation in the managing of cultural facilities, are really variable and territorially path-dependent. It is necessary to study the initiatives and



Among the prerequisites required by the municipal council to reach a management agreement, defining a line of specialization of the centre was crucial. The cultural association Casa Orlandai has thus articulated the project around the link between art and social transformation while promoting coexistence, respect and freedom. In addition to showing an interest in exploring social development from a perspective of proximity and participation, many of the centre's activities aim to build a more just society. After more than ten years of operation, Casa Orlandai has notably offered a space for reflection on the values of republicanism, local democracy and participatory governance. © Lluís "Avillop" Morera. "La nit il·lustrada", 2019. Image provided by the Casa Orlandai Cultural Association.

consider their level of maturity, the institutional framework they fall in, and the needs of the populations they are aimed at. We must conclude that their transformative potential is built on the sharing of critical approaches with other, similar initiatives, guided by a territorial networking perspective. It is clear that this is diametrically opposed to isolated and top-down provision of cultural products. By taking into account the complexities of communitarian involvement, the power of these initiatives is further enhanced.

The role of culture in rethinking the economy and fostering political empowerment is an easily neglected dimension of social innovation. With a main focus on solidarity-based, alternative, or transformative economies, social innovation strives to upscale alliances for degrowth by promoting a cultural debate on economic democratization, market

regulation initiatives and different types of decommodification policies. Neoliberal views on community development, in contrast, tend to reduce social innovation and the fight against social exclusion to actions which are limited to a certain target group (or a certain community at most) and which aim to achieve social capital through the provision of culture and the creation of certain civil society alliances. Cultural facilities managed by engaged communities have habitually been seen as arising from an interest in community development approaches and social work efforts based on the revitalization of deprived urban contexts. On the other hand, today, community development — especially that related to the provision of culture from an all-embracing point of view — is attracting the interest and active participation of the highly qualified urban middle classes. In this context, we must realize that both the resultant reflection on innovation in public policies, and the reaction against cultural capitalism are important points where the movement for community-management of cultural practices is especially relevant. In Barcelona, this has been observed and documented. In addition, over the last four decades, institutionalization and top-down approaches to cultural revitalization have brought tensions, challenges, and problems to community-management initiatives, and that has caused urban social activists to engage in theoretical reflection and develop pragmatic solutions for measuring tools that foster communitarian approaches to cultural management. It is worth pointing out that community-managed cultural centers also play an important role in defining the aims and scope of social economy activities which seek involvement in communitarian practices. The analysis of organizations in this article adds complexity to the debate on social economy from a transformational perspective. Also, the analysis shows that a consideration of actual impacts on communities is an important step in the assessment of the performance of social economy enterprises, especially those which engage in cultural revitalization. All these issues are relevant to the ongoing cultural and pre-paradigmatic (Nichols 2010) struggle to define what social economy might signify.

Finally, this research points to the need to make public management systems more flexible to ensure they acknowledge community-managed cultural facilities, and include them in public policy development. Related to this is the need to facilitate proper assessment of the facilities with the introduction of alternative metrics for value added and alternative systems to measure performance. Partnerships between public and communitarian actors need support in the form of consistent regulatory tools and measuring systems that use quantitative indicators to reveal the particular interest of those hybrid partnerships from a public value-added perspective. The inclusion of the solidarity economy or the democratic co-op domain as the third leg of these partnerships is also essential. It offers a marked contrast with the public-private alliances that became the most common form of cultural service provision in the period of neoliberal city governments. These new partnerships are advancing forms of needs satisfaction that may also be applied in other policy domains. A regulation that promotes public-communitarian alliances must have concrete tools to

measure an activity’s social impact. This is a critical point in policy making when striving for social change and democratic development. However, I argue here that the development of such regulations, with all their complexities and co-constructive approaches, is only possible when an organized civil society is institutionalized in the form of concrete organizations and socio-communitarian initiatives that operate in a policy-oriented way and develop autonomous and self-managed methods to take care of common interests.

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