New dynamics in citizen re-appropriation strategies of collective urban spaces. Case of Madrid
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Abstract

L'impegno dei cittadini per riappropriarsi degli spazi collettivi ha significato, per lungo tempo, spazi utopici di resistenza, un rifugio, una comunità autonoma che opera indipendentemente dal sistema. Questa visione sembra sottendere un approccio co-produttivo, nella letteratura come nella prassi. Lo studio intende esplorare gli effetti sullo spazio urbano delle iniziative di coproduzione nello spazio collettivo e le trasformazioni intervenute nei rapporti fra i diversi attori. Prendiamo in esame due progetti profondamente diversi, avviati di recente nella periferia di Madrid, che rappresentano la nuova ondata di azioni partecipative nel contesto cittadino. I casi analizzati evidenziano come l'incentivazione alla partecipazione promossa dalle amministrazioni locali sia supportata da forme di attivismo locale esistenti e, al contempo, abbia permesso la riduzione degli aspetti politici delle pratiche. Lo studio traccia un quadro generale dell'attivismo urbano madrileno. Ne emerge, a nostro avviso, una rete spaziale fittamente ramificata ed eterogenea, in grado di sviluppare un lavoro congiunto e di costruire spazi collettivi. Nonostante le contraddizioni che hanno accompagnato il percorso, questo è un momento di transizione, in bilico fra speranze e incertezze.

Citizen engagement in re-appropriation of collective spaces has long meant utopian spaces of resistance, a refuge or an autonomous community working aside of the system. This vision has allegedly geared towards a co-production approach both in literature and praxis. The aim of this study is to examine the effects on the urban space of co-production initiatives in the collective urban space and the changes of the relations among different actors. We examine two different recent projects in the outskirts of Madrid that represent a new wave of participative actions in the city. These cases show how the emphasis in participation from the administration partially rests on existing local activisms and at the same time, downplays the political aspect of the practices. The study reviews the background of Madrid urban activism. We find a dense heterogeneous spatial network acting together and producing collective space. Despite the contradictions that emerge during the process, the moment is one of transition with both hope and uncertainties.

Parole Chiave: coproduzione; beni comuni urbani; spazio pubblico.
Keywords: co-production; urban commons; public space.

Introduction

Walking through Madrid, Berlin, Rome or any city in Europe, certain spots and landscapes strike us for presenting what seems to be an order of their own: the painted murals and the abundance of signs on the facade of a re-appropriated building, the handmade

furniture in an otherwise empty urban void, or the wild vegetation growing behind the ramshackle fence of a community garden. Despite the apparently chaotic character of such spaces, we can usually guess if there is a collective activity going on. We may be attracted or repelled but we can recognise the traces of a community organizing its own space in the margins of the public space. Such urban landscapes are the product of a heterogeneous cosmos of collective territories of participation. This spatial order does not belong to the administration planned public realm and is not usually part of urban design disciplines, but it takes place within them. It is not part of business and market spaces, but it has a role in the local economy.

Re-appropriation spaces by the citizens may be participated or even be promoted by the institutions as it is the case of recent examples in Madrid. How do different co-produced city-making practices impact on the neighbourhood space? How does the way they are generated affect the resulting practices?

Different narratives are associated with the spatial strategies of appropriation and self-management by citizen initiatives. The paradigm of an autonomous space is epitomized by the Temporary Autonomous Zone, an image of a decentralized system of networked liberated islands (Bey, 1991), places of resistance working as heterotopic representations of an ideal society (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986). But negative traditional utopian spaces may be marked by authoritarianism and exclusion (Harvey, 2000: 239). The concept of "uncontaminated enclaves of emancipation" is questioned (Stavrides, 2015) and gradually replaced by ideas of interaction and coexistence of different and often conflicting worlds. The notion of civic spaces as culmination of aspirations for direct democracy is problematized as a negation of conflict and an idealization of public space (Delgado, 2011). Citizen self-organization does not only address necessities of the residents or fill the gaps left by a withdrawing state but also the collective aspiration of urban values and better life quality through involvement with the environment. The self-managed and co-produced space should be understood as a meeting point for the different actors, a battle ground from which ideas and proposals may emerge, a place from which to reconstruct the political sphere (Cellamare, 2014).

In a simple but useful reading, public sphere has been understood as divided into three sectors: the public administration, the market

and what could be called the communitarian sector (Alguacil, 2000). The spaces in the city that would correspond to this political realm would not necessarily be the same as state-managed public spaces nor market-managed collective spaces but would be a third type of space that has received many names: co-produced space, the Commons, collaborative space, counter-publics, re-appropriated space (Fraser, 1990). This *third space* would not be a substitute for the state, nor an incompatible alternative to the market, nor an isolated, utopian space. The *spaces of participation* would be conceived rather as a liminal territory between administration, market and citizens (Stavrides, 2015). A non-excluding approach would consider re-appropriated, self-managed spaces of participation as a necessary element that critically complements the policies of the state and challenges market appropriations but does not pretend to be a substitute for either of them. This third dimension of the public corresponds to direct participation in the production of the environment. The fundamental characteristics of this realm are not just to supply services complementing the state´s function but rather its capacity to unveil necessities and collectively address issues (Hernández Aja, 2003).

Emerging forms of activism
Social Urban Movements and Grassroots Initiatives
There has been in recent years a transition from Social Urban Movements towards Grassroots Initiatives, both in the European and the Spanish context (Stigendal, 2010; Diaz Orueta and Lourés Seoane, 2018). Between both strategies, there is a twist from mobilization against the system to mobilization for a common good. Social Urban Movements refer to collectives such as Reclaim the Streets in UK in the 1990´s who demanded their own space, denouncing and openly challenging urban planning, regulations and administration politics. Social Urban Movements in Madrid as the squat movement and the neighbour´s associations in the 1980´s had an enormous significance in more recent urban activisms (Carmona, 2007).
Today´s grassroots initiatives focus rather on the solution of specific urban problems. These initiatives can overlap with the administration and the economic space, including entrepreneurship or the creation of economic activities (Stigendal, 2010). The term *initiative* implies capacity of action, autonomy

and the constant evolution of the action. At the same time grassroots refers to a bottom-up direction of the action. The origin is context-related, and it suggests the stakeholders have a "weak institutional position" (Fraisse, 2011). Grassroots initiatives have gradually been integrated in public enforced actions and urban development. At the same time political contestation has sometimes been minimized or discouraged (García, 2006; Taylor, 2007).

The emerging forms of organization have been defined as *local welfare systems*, referring to those mechanisms that consist of a combination of formal and informal services (Stigendal, 2010) or *multi-stakeholder coalitions* (Fraisse, 2011). The structure of the initiative consists of a wide collaboration among public stakeholders, public institutions and private actors. As we will see in the case study, we can find organizations of different collectives where the relation among them is mediated by actors from public institutions. The agenda is managed by the participant stakeholders through an array of formal/informal strategies. The common goals that maintains the system together are the management of space and resources, the access to them and the efforts to give visibility to demands and necessities in the community. Coexistence of formal (institutional) and informal actors is obviously not straightforward and there is a necessarily fragile equilibrium of forces and interests.

Evolution of Social Urban Movements in Madrid

The antecedents of contemporary urban activisms in Madrid can be traced to the times before the democracy. Two movements are especially relevant in this context: neighbour´s associations and occupied social centres. In recent times, the real state crisis of 2008 and the austerity politics caused a situation of social unrest. Movement 15M (May 15) in 2011 was the name for the massive occupation of squares originated in Madrid central Puerta del Sol and subsequent social and political upheavals in Spain amidst the international *take the square* movements. This event is also critical to understand today´s boom of participation and collaborative processes in the city.

Neighbour´s movements
The historic neighbour´s associations are still a key actor in

today´s re-appropriation initiatives. The generation of people that fought for dignified housing and basic neighbourhood services during the 1960´s in Madrid is now still active and they have a leading role in associative movements and social initiatives. This fact is somehow contradictory with the emphasis given in academic contexts to the empowerment of citizens brought about by new information technologies. An older generation of practitioners with a strong sense of solidarity was at the core of the *15M* movement. It is a heterogenic collective who started neighbour´s associations at a time when they were banned. With deep mistrust for any administration, they have at the same time a very pragmatic approach.

The wave of immigrants from the country side during the decades of the 1950´s and the 1960´s concentrated in the periphery of Madrid. Informal settlements, shanty towns, various housing programs and pre-existing villages became the origin of contemporary neighbourhoods. Basic services often relied on self-organization (Carmona, 2007). The neighbour´s association movement started in the informal settlements. One of the residents of those days refers that the self-construction of dwellings needed a collective force to put the structure up overnight and thus avoid the police. Early resistance practices, crystalized in the first social movements, with a strong local character and neighbourhood identity. The FRAVM (Federation of Neighbour´s Associations of Madrid) was legalized in 1977. In 1979 the Communist Party and the Socialist Party won the local elections, marking the end of the first cycle of social movements in the neighbourhoods.

Self-Managed Occupied Social Centres
The squat movement in Madrid is connected to the underground Punk scene. In 1985 an abandoned building in Malasaña neighbourhood was occupied for socio-cultural activities by the collective KOKA (Kolektivo Okupantes de la Kalle Amparo). The occupation lasted only 10 days, but it marked the beginning of occupied social centres in Madrid (Carmona, 2007). All through the 1990´s the movement had important bastions as the *Laboratorios*. Place attachment was very present from the beginning, stressing the aspect of transforming the city. Occupied social centres became a key element of social innovation, housing various activities and giving room to resistance movements. Some of the occupied centres achieved in time recognition from the

Municipality. In 2013 the conservative administration conceded to the Social Centre Seco after twenty-three years of existence the use of part of a cultural centre.

Experts involvement
The burst of the speculative bubble with the 2008 crisis, had an enormous impact on the city social unrest (Arana, 2014). Between 2009 and 2011 several self-managed collective spaces emerged in Madrid. There were re-appropriated urban voids as *Plaza de la Cebada* or *Esto es una Plaza* and the self-managed art centre, *Tabacalera*. Through struggle and mobilization some of these spaces managed to obtain some form of permission or agreement with public institutions (Gomez Nieto, 2015; Walliser, 2013).
Many of these initiatives had a strong involvement of artists and especially architects' collectives from the start. These groups produced a conceptual change for the profession. Transformation of public spaces and innovative solutions for citizen participation became prominent issues in architecture discourse. Projects as *Cinema Usera*, led by architects collective *Todo por la Praxis*, mixing design, reuse, participation and self-construction of urban elements and are born from those experiences.

15M and municipal elections 2015
Three years after the beginning of the crisis, Movement 15M was a big catalyser for many disperse emancipatory struggles nationwide (Janoschka and Mateos, 2015). The movement was not only driven by citizen complains as could be assumed given the name *Los Indignados*, but it was also very proactive. In the intense months that followed, debates took place across Madrid in multiple Neighbourhood Assemblies that spread from a central Sol Assembly in *Puerta del Sol* and were sub-organized in different commissions, discussing with a sense of urgency very diverse topics: economics, urbanism, gender, culture, energy, environment, education, health. After some months the presence on the streets declined, by then new methods and networks had flourished. The neighbourhoods of the city lived a proliferation of social movements and the construction of new collective actors (Diaz Orueta and Lourés Seoane, 2018). The existing neighbourhood associations were strengthened and there was a boost to social innovation in every sector.
Nevertheless, no significant changes in policies of citizen

participation were at the time incorporated by local administration (Andreeva Eneva and Abellán, 2017). This situation changed to some extent after the change in the local government in 2015. After 24 years of conservative rule, a new coalition of parties, some born of the *15M* movement, won the Municipality of Madrid. Three aspects of the new policy towards participation in the public space can be highlighted:

- Publication of criteria for the cession of municipal spaces for citizen entities. This initiative tackles the claims of social movements to be able to legally appropriate vacant buildings belonging to the Municipality. The City Council publishes calls for proposals for specific spaces and takes care of the refurbishing of the buildings.
- Program of urban communitarian food gardens. The movement of community gardens has been growing in the city from 2010. This formal framework has promoted the multiplication of such initiatives which form an important network of collectives and spaces.
- Impulse to artistic collaborative projects programs in the public space. Programs as *Paisaje Sur* and *Imagina Madrid* have been mediated by the previously existing municipal art institution *Intermediae* and fed by a tireless mesh of urban activists and artists´ collectives.

Case studies

The studied cases belong to a new generation of participative collective urban spaces as opposed to the initiatives prior to the current city administration.

CSA Playagata
One of the first municipal spaces assigned to citizen entities was in 2017 the Social Centre *Playagata* in the neighbourhood of Fuencarral. The case has been showcased by the Council in participation events through its first months. It can be considered a prototype of the self-managed social centre model promoted by the Municipality. The cession of municipal spaces had been under negotiation with collectives and associations since 2015. After continuous confrontations with the Municipality, the long-lasting necessities of space from social collectives was addressed

with a program to assign the management of certain spaces to citizen entities. Out of this program, *CSA Playagata* came into life. A polemical issue was how to determine the public interest of the projects. The 2016 directive for the cession of municipal spaces includes several conditions that the proposed projects should comply with: district centred activities, promotion of citizen participation, development of the community and improvement of life quality, protection of equity, fight against social exclusion and promotion of social goals. Such criteria could be considered difficult to assess. The measure has been criticised by the opposition for being politically biased and favouring akin collectives. On the other hand, squat movements and social collectives have been also very critical with the participation process. Main complaints include excessive bureaucracy or the promotion of a public-private collaboration model rather than a completely independent citizen management.

New generation social centres are born in strong connection with a mesh of existing neighbour´s associations. The FRAVM for example, operates within the facility a service for employment dynamization service and assistance to new born associations.

In the case of *CSA Playagata*, the administration remains involved in the everyday life of the Centre through social programs such as *Experimenta Distrito* and the Municipal Service of Support to Citizen Participation.

The allocated building is an old unused school of 800 m2. It is in the *Poblado Dirigido C*. A housing complex that dates from 1960, a modernist scheme designed by the architects Jose Luis Romany and Luis Miquel. At the time it was built, the new neighbourhood was surrounded by a transforming rural territory that rapidly became the periphery of Madrid. Struggles over time to improve services and life quality resulted in a very cohesive social tissue. Today, the area sits next to the biggest development project in contemporary Madrid, Distrito Castellana Norte, impulsed by the growing real-estate market in the city after a decade of stagnation. It was expected that the cessions would be done to neighbour´s associations or to radical activist collectives. It is significant that the management of the space was assigned to a health-related association without political agenda. During the process of selection of proposals, the Municipality mediated to put together a project for the space with participation of multiple groups and the leadership of a collective unknown to local activists. The

overlapping of different approaches and interests introduces a high level of complexity. These groups include a senior citizen activity group, cultural associations and activist groups. The building has its own food garden and various meeting spaces. The different groups manage together the space and are open to proposals from other collectives.
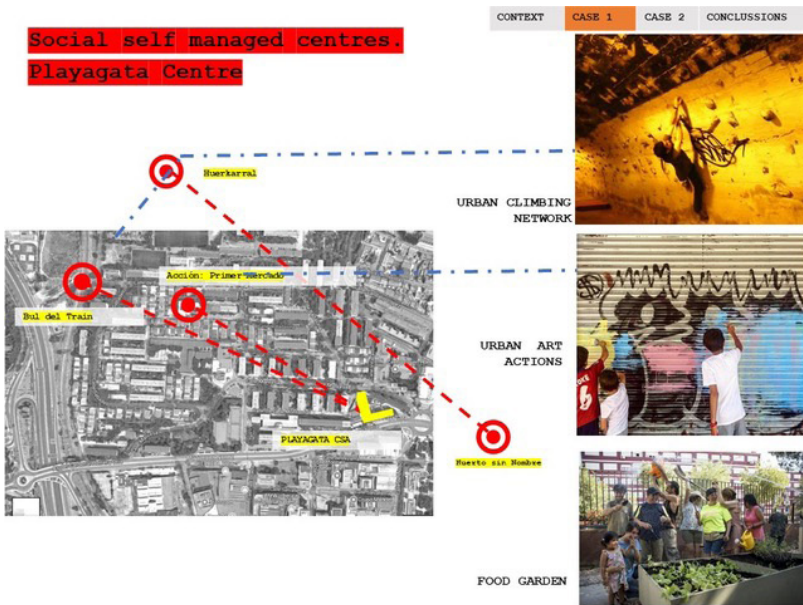

Fig.1. Neighbourhood Spatial Network. *CSA Playagata*

Cinema Usera
Leftover spaces, empty plots, urban ruins: they have become since the 90´s protagonists of countless academic studies (De Solà-Morales, 2013). Ever since neorealist films, the character of the periphery is deeply associated to the urban void. The growth of Madrid caused by the countryside-city immigration in the 60s and 70s produced a peripheral landscape characteristic of expectant areas between the countryside and the city. Intermittently occupied by slums of informal housing and new residential developments, the edge of the city was an element in constant change and the empty plots were the childhood playground of an entire generation. This urban landscape was reflected in films, photography and painting. After the rise and burst of real state bubble in the beginning of the century, empty plots in Madrid became harder to come across.

A neglected patch of a green area in the Usera neighbourhood, just north of the park of Pradolongo and with privileged views became in 2016 the site for *Cinema Usera*. *Paisaje Sur* was part of the program for the betterment of the urban landscape promoted by Madrid City Council´s General Direction of Intervention on Urban Landscape and Cultural Heritage in collaboration with *Intermediae*. The program extended from 2013 to 2016. Known as Los Paisajes, the initiative consisted of pilot intervention projects in the public space. The program was launched in neighbourhoods of very different characteristics; all of them far from the central areas of Madrid and from the most visible re-appropriation projects of collective spaces. The program aimed to put together artists and local stakeholders to intervene on the public space of selected neighbourhoods. The specific areas of intervention were chosen through workshops and *dérives* conducted collaboratively with all participants. One of the most successful interventions was *Cinema Usera*.

Usera is a neighbourhood with a very large migrant population, mainly of Chinese origin. The district has the lowest life expectancy in Madrid and one of the highest unemployment rates. The open-air cinema is a traditional leisure event in old Madrid streets and the name of *Cinema Usera* brings memories of lost neighbourhood cinemas that dotted the city. *Intermediae* acts as mediator getting in touch with several selected technical or artistic teams and neighbour´s associations, a local artist co working space or an adjacent fringe theatre. The collective of architects *Todo por la Praxis* led the design of furniture and directed the building workshops to put up the infrastructure. Recycled boards from unused benched were given by the Council and the project was realized with a minimum budget. The space has an intense use by the neighbours all through the summer. Decision making is articulated through a co-management board composed by administration and stakeholders. The board meets once a month. After the experience of *Los Paisajes*, Madrid Council launched in 2017 the program *Imagina Madrid*. It is an ambitious upgrading of the previous project with nine different locations and 540.000 € budget. After the selection of sites and a diagnosis of designated neighbourhoods, a call for proposals was published, addressing artists and technicians with proven experience in collaborative projects in the public space. The process included co-design boards, where initially selected artists get together and interact

in the creation of the site-specific project. Some voices of participants from previous experience have criticised the call for lacking a reflection on the deficits of the process. One recurrent criticism is the need for a slower pace in participation processes that collides sometimes with political timing.

Incidentally, the park of Pradolongo, in front of *Cinema Usera*, was the first public space in Madrid realized through citizen participation as early as 1978. The poll that was conducted among neighbours at the time resulted in aspirations of "walking, listening to music and watching shows in the park". Forty years later, the threat of gentrification is running parallel to the rise in participative movements. In 2017 Usera was considered by Airbnb as one of the 17 emergent neighbourhoods worldwide, with a growth of 228% inbound guest arrivals in the period 2015-2016.
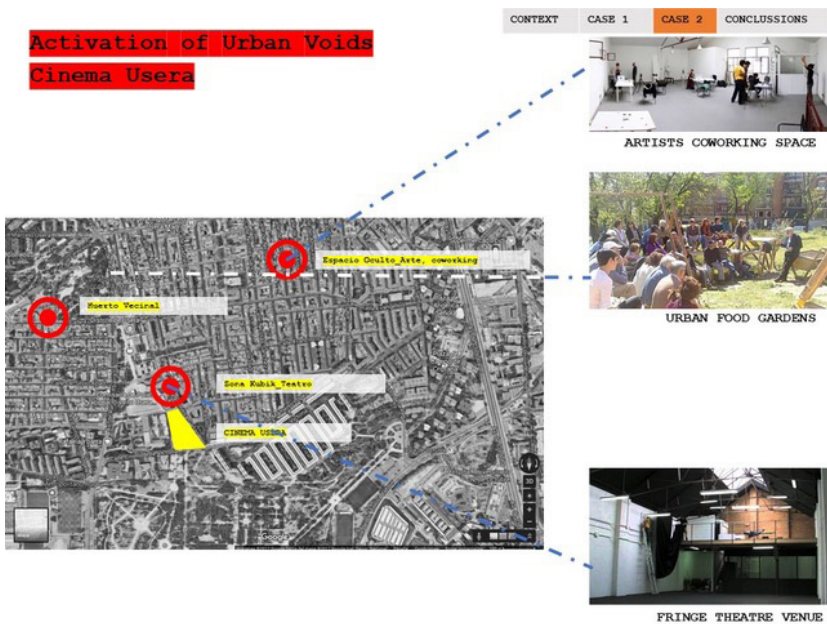

Fig.2. Neighbourhood Spatial Network. *Cinema Usera*

Effects in the urban collective space

In environmental psychology spatial appropriation has been defined through a dual model composed of transforming action and symbolic identification (Vidal and Pol, 2005). For the study of re-appropriated urban space, together with identity, we will divide action into social and physical transformations. The resulting

working triad for re-appropriation of urban spaces would be: a. Cultural space, regarding shared memory and identity aspects. b. Social space, focusing on inclusion and social capital, economy and politics. c. Urban space in its physical aspect. Maps of stakeholders, activities and spatial relations have been developed for the analysis of the study cases.

Cultural space
The location of the *CSA Playagata* centre in an existing building with its own history of public use in the *Poblado Dirigido* makes it a reference for the revitalization of the neighbourhood. Re-appropriation of space is not limited to the building, but it adopts unexpected forms. One of the groups involved coordinates informal use of climbing areas. Vertical walls in leftover areas and tunnels under the railway are given a new use by an informal collective of young people through specialized webpages and forums. These offer detailed information about the geometry of the tunnels, the walls, the materials and the technical aspects of the climbing elements. This practice re-appropriates and makes visible marginal spaces. The neighbours´ association, *Pobladores*, has promoted identity projects such as documentary videos and has led a revitalization project of the urban image through actions on the abandoned market infrastructure. The project originates in the Citizen Labs organized by a program connected to cultural municipal institutions, *Experimenta Distrito*. The action consisted on a collaborative urban art event at the abandoned local market. The Social Centre has also hosted workshops of the project *Los Madriles* Map of Citizen Initiatives. Also promoted from the municipal cultural institutions, it aims to give visibility to different social actors and local initiatives in the city through workshops in the different districts, where the participants develop maps of the most significant actions, associations, public space appropriations, collaborative spaces and historic activist organisations in the chosen neighbourhood. It draws from citizen experience and knowledge of their social environment. But the map itself is seen by the mediators rather as an excuse than as an end by itself. The goal of the project is to bring together different local stakeholders and to create a space for the promotion of the associative tissue of the city. During the presentation of the project´s outcome in the Centre, a debate was originated about the times of the project not allowing for enough

feedback from the neighbours.

The two case studies are very different. The self-managed social centre has the possibility of launching ephemeral actions as we have seen with the collaboration of council programs as *Experimenta Distrito*. It can stimulate and host socio-cultural activities. The different actors can gain visibility for their different complaints and proposals for the neighbourhood. On the other hand, *Cinema Usera* is a bold action on the public space, bringing to life a degraded green area and activating it with resident's management. It can be questioned nevertheless whether the participation process that ultimately puts together the initiative is a genuine grassroots movement. The initiative of the institution served here as catalyst for a successful space, but it may not work under different conditions. In terms of culture, the space becomes the scenario to be programmed, not only for spectators but also for co-production of knowledge and culture. Community engagement depends on a successful management process.

Social space
a. Inclusion. Social Centres as *Playagata* combine different social groups. The space includes senior citizens through active aging initiatives such as a water-colourists association and young initiatives as the climbing group. Both groups at the same time re-appropriate public space in the neighbourhood through their own activities. These may consist of group *dérives* of the senior citizens painting their environment or the activation of leftover spaces through sports meetings and social networks.

Social impact in the case of *Cinema Usera* is clear through the prolonged leisure activity that transforms the project into a landmark for the neighbourhood rather than an ephemeral event. Creation of social networks is less formal. On an everyday dimension, the creation of a weekly event offers a chance for interaction among neighbours for as long as the project runs. On the other hand, the process of putting together the space, the collaboration between collectives, the building of the furniture and the technical aspects, created bonds and opened new connections between groups.

b. Economy. The building reform for *Playagata* centre was a public investment. But aspects as organisation and management activities are not financed. They depend greatly on voluntary work of those involved. The initial approach to *Cinema Usera* was done

in collaboration with local artist spaces. The neighbourhood has an emergent life of new business and the initiative was an opportunity for visibility. Despite that, civil economy has hardly been a driving force in this generation of participative programs and it could be one of its weaknesses for long term sustainability of the projects.

c. Politics. The associations that joined forces to obtain the cession of the space for the social centre are very diverse in nature. Therefore, there is not a unified political vision. Some of the groups within it are strongly related to neighbour´s association with a marked vindictive approach and there is one anticapitalistic group integrating the coalition, but those views are not necessarily shared by the senior citizen and the health associations. As for *Cinema Usera*, the nature of the project is not explicitly political either, although the topics of cultural inclusion, citizen participation and neighbourhood identity are very present in the programming of the space.

		CSA PLAYAGATA	CINEMA USERA
SOCIAL SPACE	INCLUSION	SENIOR CITIZEN COMMUNITIES HEALTH ACTIVISM FOOD GARDEN TRANSVERSAL ACTIVITIES LOCAL GROUPS INFO POINT COUNCIL SERVICE OF SUPPORT TO DISTRICT CITIZEN PARTICIPATION	HORIZONTAL: INFORMAL SOCIAL NETWORKS
	ECONOMY	PARTIAL FINANCING FROM CITY COUNCIL: BLD RENOVATION	MINIMUM INITIAL INVESTMENT FROM CULTURAL INSITUTION
	POLITICS	VERY DIVERSE POSITIONS	NOT EXPLICITLY POLITICAL
CULTURAL SPACE		STORYTELLING WORKSHOPS NEIGHBOURHOOD DISCOVERY: WALKS, CLIMBING GROUP, WATERCOLOURS ASSOCIATION	SELF ORGANISED CULTURAL PROGRAM
URBAN SPACE		RE-APPROPRIATION OF PUBLIC FACILITY EPHEMERAL ACTIONS IN PUBLIC SPACE	CREATION OF AN EVENT BASED NEW COLLECTIVE SPACE RE-APPROPRIATION OF LANDSCAPE ASSETS: PARK, VIEWS

Table 1. Comparative of cases

Conclusions

New strategies of co-production of participation spaces in Madrid between citizens' associations and the local administration are the product of a long evolution and learning processes on both sides. They are not free of doubts and they present some problems. These initiatives respond to a social need for participation spaces: both physical and political. They render visibility and legitimation to existing collaborative processes.

Projects like *CSA Playagata* become significant spaces of dialogue with the administration in the process of creating new subjects of participation. It is important to note how identarian initiatives draw heavily on pre-existing groups and the associative tissue of the neighbourhood. It is that superposition of networks what the Municipality is aiming to enhance and organize. But neighbours movements are not a compliant subject to work with. The participation processes launched by the administration have been welcomed by several collectives that had been fighting for their space and visibility for years. Nevertheless, the expectations generated by the multiple programs were very high and have also caused strong criticism. Main complaints concern time consuming bureaucracy procedures and financing of the activities themselves. There is also a critical attitude from the practitioners towards the formal aspects of the participation processes as the participants may feel they do not completely control the outcome of the process. One participant expressed his concern that 'Participation has killed participation'. On the other hand, some practitioners agree that for the first time in many years the institutions attend the demands for collaborative spaces. Efforts from the council administration have brought forward the role of citizen participation in urban matters.

If we compare contemporary situation to the heroic times of Madrid neighbour´s associations, it seems the earlier struggle was concerned with basic rights of the neighbourhoods in a context of illegality and repression. Nowadays, the struggle of urban activism continues and there are new challenges as gentrification. The association movements have gained visibility and are more often legitimized as valid intermediaries. New channels for participation are opened but the object of the actions is nevertheless less clear. The political claims are blurred, and the goal seems to be sometimes the normalization

of the participation itself, rather than its specific content.

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