

**Public value in temporary practices of self-organization.
Lessons from Santiago's Mapocho Pedaleable**
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Abstract

L'articolo esamina la relazione tra auto-organizzazione e valore pubblico attraverso lo studio della pratica *Mapocho Pedaleable* a Santiago – una riappropriazione di una sponda del fiume altrimenti inutilizzata, e ora destinata a spazio pubblico. Focalizzandosi sulla discussione sul valore pubblico, l'articolo esplora criticamente la misura in cui queste pratiche sfidano il significato di tale valore nella creazione di spazi in cui i cittadini si riuniscono con uno scopo comune, nell'intento di costringere le autorità ad agire. Mettendo in discussione la relazione tra organizzazioni civiche e istituzioni statali, la ricerca si propone di svelare la misura in cui i diversi attori coinvolti perseguono fini pubblici attraverso pratiche di auto-organizzazione. L'articolo sostiene che il potenziale di trasformazione delle pratiche di auto-organizzazione possa essere ampliato solo combinando gli interessi e le motivazioni dei diversi gruppi, senza posizionare gli interessi privati al di sopra del valore pubblico. Questo studio esplorativo ha adottato un approccio qualitativo, basato principalmente su interviste semi-strutturate condotte sul campo, e parte di una ricerca più ampia.

This paper examines the relation between self-organization and public value through the study of Santiago's *Mapocho Pedaleable* practice, a reclamation of an unused river bank in the city as a space for the public. Centring on the discussion of the public sphere, the paper critically explores the extent to which self-organization practices challenge the meaning of the public when creating spaces in which citizens come together, with a common purpose, in an intent to compel authorities to action. By questioning the relationship between civic organizations and State institutions, the research seeks to unravel the extent to which the different actors at play pursue public value through practices of self-organization. I suggest that the transformative potential of self-organized practices can only be expanded when combining the interests and motivations of the different groups without positioning private interests over public value. A qualitative research approach was adopted to conduct this exploratory study, based primarily on semi-structured interviews conducted in the field which are part of a wider research endeavour.

Parole chiave: sfera pubblica; auto-organizzazione; Santiago

Keywords: public sphere; self-organization; Santiago

Introduction

«I believe that not only the definition of the project with all the technical complexities, the number of entities, the citizen dimension but also the

¹ All interview quotes used in the paper have been translated by the author from Spanish.

symbolic dimension, recovering the river bank became a political statement that goes far beyond the 5.5 km of cycle path. It's much more than that» (Interviewee 12, Regional Government Representative).

One Sunday in May 2011 a group of about 400 cyclists occupy an emblematic and neglected public space in the city of Santiago, the river bank of *Mapocho* river, in order to reclaim its ignored public value. As recognized on the above quotation, the reclamation and recovery of the river carries a symbolic and political dimension that goes far beyond the physical transformation of space. In an intent to compel authorities to action, this process of self-organization challenges the value and meaning of the public while bringing attention to a forgotten (public) space.

What does the public means in the city? The term 'public' is associated with the terms public space, public sphere, public realm, 'publicness' and with the public itself. The term can be traced back to the Latin term 'publicus' which means «of the people; of the state; done for the state, (but) also the common, general, public; ordinary or vulgar» (Harper, 2001-2017). The discussions of the public sphere have grown in importance by the emergence and formation of different 'publics' or civic groups that have «unleashed accelerating changes across public cultures and civil societies, and altered the practices of democratic struggle and deliberation» (Goodnight, 1997b). The discussion is even more critical in a context where neoliberal thinking is dominant, and in which civic groups are leading initiatives for expanding the potential of public spaces.

The aim of this paper is to explore the relationship between public value and self-organization through the study of the *Mapocho Pedaleable* practice, a temporary practice of self-organization initiated as a reclamation of Santiago's founding river. My intention is to unpack the relations among the different actors involved in the process and specifically, to focus in the perceptions of both State actors and activist's groups, while considering their diversity and their multiple interests at stake. The question that guides this paper is what are the controversial relations between civic organizations and State institutions in the *Mapocho Pedaleable* practice? The underlying premise is on the ambiguity of self-organization practices. The diverse intentions and motivations of the actors interacting in such practices, both converge and diverge with public value and common good. This

paper attempts to show that the transformative potential of self-organized practices can only be expanded when enhancing mechanisms for dialogue and collaboration with a focus on public value, without negating dissensus in the process of production of space. The paper will first attempt to present the practice of study within the context of the city of Santiago and Chile's neoliberal politics, to then establish its theoretical foundations and methodological approach. It will close with the analysis and discussion of the case and conclusions.

Santiago's *Mapocho Pedaleable*: Reclaiming the use of the river as a public space

The Chilean capital, Santiago, has an estimate number of 7.3 million inhabitants which represents 40% of the country population. It is a deeply segregated city and its urban structure reflects its extreme socio-economic inequality. The metropolitan area of 'Greater Santiago' is atomized in 34 municipalities, and although it has high levels of access to basic infrastructure and public services, the quality of them differ greatly in different boroughs of the capital (Rodríguez and Winchester, 2001). Santiago is a paradigmatic case as the neoliberal model imposed by Pinochet's dictatorship perpetuates today. The neoliberal project influenced by Milton Friedman, ideated by the 'Chicago Boys' and implemented by the dictatorship (1973-1990) had the aim of destroying civil society networks, reducing the power of the state and expanding the control of the private sector by freeing the market economy. The neoliberal project has deeply influenced Santiago's urban development. Examples of this neoliberalisation process are seen in the public-private focus of the social housing market, the privatization of water networks (Hidalgo and Janoschka, 2014), the gentrification of central areas triggered by real estate developments (Lopez Morales, 2011) and in the processes of commodification and privatization of public spaces.

Back in the 1990s when Chile opened to democracy, after seventeen years of dictatorship, paradoxically, social movements were mostly quiet (Paley, 2001). The strong social mobilizations for land and housing in the 60's, the workers' movement and social mobilizations enhanced by Allende's Popular Unity in the early 70's, and the political manifestations against the dictatorship

in the 80's appeared to diminish in the outset of democracy (Paley, 2001). However, in 2011, the wave of mobilizations that emerge in various parts of the world hit Chile. The widespread student movement protests, known as the *Chilean Spring*, were the most visible of various other political, environmental, social and economic demands emerging in the form of social mobilization happening then and during the following years (Donoso and von Bülow, 2017). After a decade from the return to democracy, social movements were showing their strength and transformative potential. Civil society organizations were supporting and leading manifestations but also, opening new possibilities for self-organization connected to not just reactive but proactive actions and temporary self-organization practices.

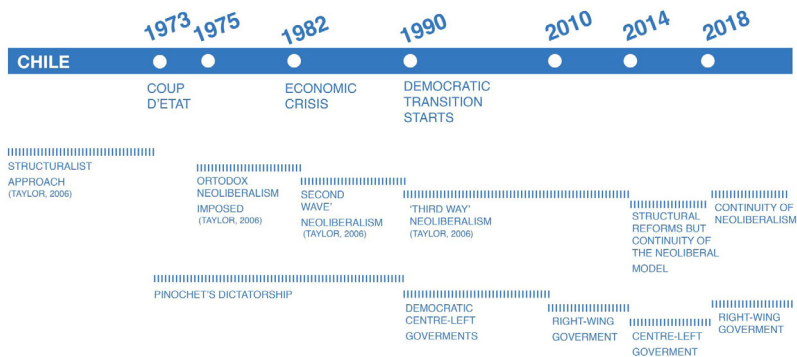


Figure 1. Timeline of Chilean Neoliberal Context | Source: Author's own based on Taylor (2006).

Temporary self-organization practices, such as street markets, squats and artistic manifestations, have a long history in cities, as it has had in Santiago. However, the character, reasons and intentions of such practices varies, ranging from insurgent and resistance practices, to others been complicit to the capitalist mode of production imposed by the neoliberal project. Recently, there has been renewed interest in the topic due to the global spread of these practices and faster speed of their occurrence (Ferreri, 2015; Madanipour, 2017: 176). The public space debate has gained fresh prominence with many arguing that this new paradigm is a complex arena where roles and rights are getting redistributed and defying the traditional logic of public space

provision (Bodnar, 2015; De Magalhães, 2010; Gadanho, 2014). Practices of self-organization, hand-made interventions, do-it-yourself (DIY) actions, citizen-led initiatives and provisional, interim, or insurgent public space appropriations are different ways to name this expanding urban trend (de Certau, 1984; Gadanho, 2014; Hou, 2010; Lydon and Garcia, 2015; Madanipour, 2017; Rosa and Weiland, 2013). Whereas some of these terms used emphasize its mode of production, others, highlight its temporary condition or character. Making use of the unused, vacant, interstitial, lost, ruined, neglected and abandoned spaces; these practices are reclaiming the 'publicness' of public space by occupying it temporarily for political, social, environmental and economical purposes. As Jeffrey Hou claims,

«these instances of self-made urban spaces, reclaimed and appropriated sites, temporary events and flash mobs (...) have provided new expressions of the collective realms in the contemporary city. No longer confined to the archetypal categories of neighbourhood parks public plaza, and civic architecture, these insurgent public spaces challenge the conventional, codified notion of public and the making of space» (Hou, 2010: 2).

I define temporary self-organization practices as self-made, experimental and collective actions of citizens and civic organizations, driven by a will of producing transformative change in the city and done under the logic of reversibility. I consider temporary self-organization experiences as non-linear processes but cyclical ones, because cities are in constant flux. Self-organization does not just comply counter-hegemonic practices of resistance but also practices that relate to power structures through their collective actions. *Mapocho Pedaleable* was chosen within this framework for analysis because is an emblematic and contested temporary self-organization practice in Santiago, in which different State and civic actors have been involved for almost a decade.

In the heart of the Chilean capital, *Mapocho Pedaleable* was emerging at the same time that political demonstrations for free education spread through the capital. *Mapocho Pedaleable* is a self-organized practice driven by individuals and pro-cycling civil society organizations who seek to transform *Mapocho's* river bank into an open public space with a cycling path. The self-organized practice was initiated as an academic proposal within an architecture school by two (now former) graduate students.

The idea was tested for the first time in 2011, when about 400 people and activists led by the students, cycled through a small stretch of the river bank and register their experience raising awareness of the action through social networks and online platforms. The initiative arises following the river clean-up of sewerage discharges executed by the water utility company serving Santiago. The river bank is a national good for public use (BNUP) not accessible to the public, and although it was not illegal to use it, the first occupation of the river was done without any official form of authorization.

Following the first activity in the river, the Centre of Public Policies (CPP) of *Universidad Católica* and the former local mayors of Santiago and Providencia, two central municipalities of the city, offered institutional support to the group that came up with the idea and they start collaborating. In 2013, with the support of local governments and civil society organizations the river bank was opened to the public during a single-day event known as *Yo Vivo Mapocho* that summoned more than 4.000 people (Pedaleable, 2017). By building temporary accesses to the river with scaffolding and scheduling activities for a day the aim was to encourage citizens to make use of the space. During the same time, the CPP was showing the project to diverse government representatives triggering a study driven by the central government's Transportation Planning Secretariat (SECTRA) for evaluating its feasibility.



Image 1. Yo Vivo Mapocho 2014. Source: Author's own

Following so, and supported by the local governments, the leading group won an urban development and social inclusion contest from the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) which meant getting resources for developing the project design. The team worked in parallel both in developing the events in the river and in the design project of the accesses. In 2014, *Yo Vivo Mapocho* event was held during one day and in 2015 the river was open for two consecutive days attracting approximately 30.000 people. By then, the political support of the former Metropolitan Regional Government Governor was openly manifested and he lead a process to involve both the Minister of Public Works (MOP) and the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism (MINVU) in the design of the long-term project for transforming the river into a public space.

During the 5th World Bike Forum held in Chile in 2016, the river was occupied by approximately 50.000 people during six consecutive days. Through a private company sponsorship secured by some of the creators of the idea (i.e. the NGO *Pedaleable*), a strip of the river bank was paved to facilitate the transit of cyclists for the first time (*Pedaleable*, 2017). After this event, President Bachelet committed presidential priority to the initiative encouraging the Regional Metropolitan Government (GORE RM) to fund the initiative to recover 7 kms. of the river as an accessible public space. The political support received triggered two parallel processes. On the one hand, MOP lead the design of the bidding process of the project by bringing together different areas of expertise within the Ministry (i.e. National Architecture Directorate, Hydraulic Works Directorate, Roadways Agency, National Institute of Hydraulic) and from the Ministry of Housing and Urbanization (i.e. Housing and Urbanization Service of the Metropolitan Region, SERVIU). On the other hand, a four months pilot project lead by GORE for opening the space to be used in an everyday basis, named *Interim Mapocho Pedaleable*, was carried out from December 2016 to April 2017 and during the following year for an additional five months period (i.e. Oct 2017-Mar 2018).

Nearly 10M USD on funding was secured for the long-term project through a National Fund for Regional Development (NFRD) of the GORE RM and the bidding process to define the contractors that will deliver the project was published in December 2017. The project was meant to enable a flood park, including a 5 kms.

paving strip, four staircase-accesses and two universal accesses (GORE, 2017). The outcome of this story is still to be written. Currently, after the change of administration of the central government in March 2018, the bidding process was revoked by MOP following an instruction given by the current administration of GORE RM that questions the use the approved public funds for the project and have sent a query to the General Comptroller of the Republic to oversee the decision of the former regional authority.

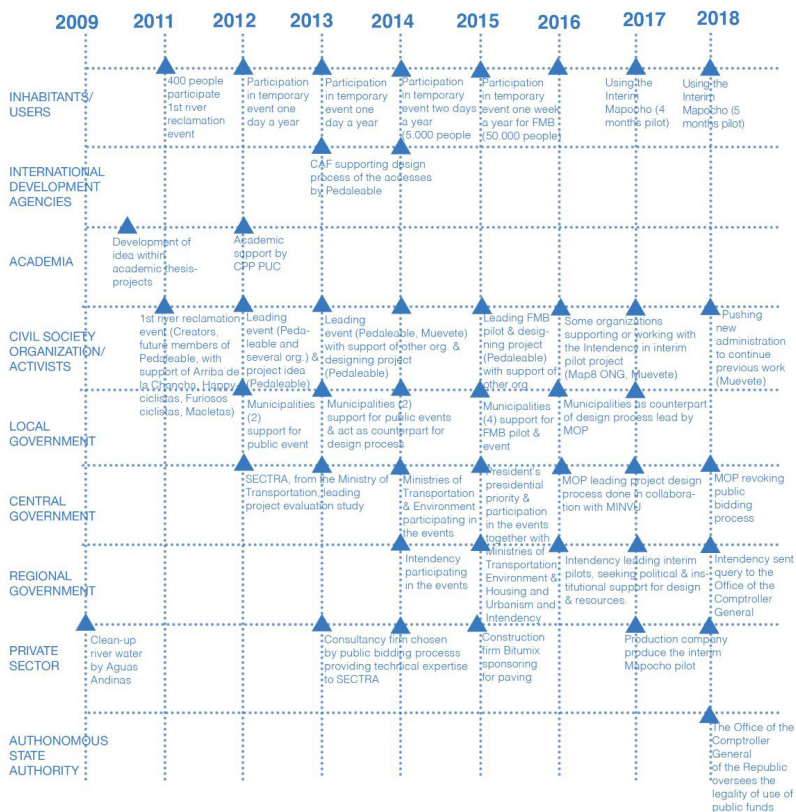


Figure 2. Mapping roles of actors in time Source: Author's own based on interviews and secondary analysis data.

Self-organization through the lens of the public sphere

What are the contradictory relationships between civic organizations and State institutions in the Mapocho Pedaleable practice? How those interactions are challenging the meaning

and value of the public? The discussions of the public sphere play a critical role in our understanding of self-organization as self-organization create spaces in which everyday citizens come together with a common purpose, in an intent to compel authorities to action, thus challenging the meaning of the public. The contemporary sociologist Manuel Castells defines the public sphere as «an essential component of sociopolitical organization because it is the space where people come together as citizens and articulate their autonomous views to influence the political institutions of society» (Castells, 2008: 78). For him, the interaction between government and civil society through the public sphere is constituent of democracy. He argues the State flows away of its interests when there is not an «effective civil society capable of structuring and channelling citizen debates over diverse ideas and conflicting interests» (ibid.). The public sphere, as a space of communication of ideas and projects, is inseparable from the interaction between the civil society and the State (ivi).

Discussions about the public sphere have been approached from several disciplines such as philosophy and political theory (Arendt, 2013; Fraser, 1990; Habermas, 1989; Habermas, Lennox and Lennox, 1974; Staiger, 2009; Villa, 1992), rhetoric and communication (Goodnight, 1997a, 1997b, 2012; Hauser, 1998, 2001; Phillips, 1996), sociology and anthropology (Castells, 2008; Low and Smith, 2006), among others. However, the contemporary understanding of the term is founded in the work of the critical philosopher Jürgen Habermas who did a comprehensive analysis of its nature. In his influential publication *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), Habermas define Öffentlichkeit (public sphere) as a sphere between civil society and the state, describing it as «the sphere of private people coming together as a public» (ivi: 27). His conceptualization considers a «model of a bourgeois public sphere emerging as a horizon of values and forms of rational critical communication» (Staiger, 2009: 311). Similarly, Hanna Arendt describes the public sphere as a space of tangible freedom where individuals are treated as equals (Villa, 1992). For both Habermas and Arendt the public sphere is an arena for political action separated from the state and the economy (ivi). The critical theorist Nancy Fraser (1990) rethinks the notion of the public sphere by questioning four key assumptions of the

bourgeoisie model of the public sphere as proposed by Habermas. First, the assumption that it is possible for the diverse publics in the public sphere to set aside their differences «to deliberate ‘as if’ they were social equals» (ivi:62), because in the bourgeois public sphere some members were marginalized and prevented to participate as peers. Second, the assumption that «a single, comprehensive public sphere is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics», because in a single arena subordinated groups or alternative publics will have no space for deliberation (*ibid*). Third, the assumption that discourses «in public spheres should be restricted to deliberation about the common good, and that the appearance of ‘private interests’ (...) is always undesirable» (*ibid*), because through contestation and deliberation matters of common concern should be decided, and those could include matters normally labelled as ‘personal’ or ‘private’. Finally, the assumption of the needed strong separation between the State and the civil society because as she argues, what indeed is needed is some form of interrelation to avoid the promotion of what she coins as ‘weak publics’ (ivi: 75). Therefore, Fraser claims for a valuable new non-bourgeois model of the public sphere that can allow us «to think about ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ publics» (ivi: 76) within an hybrid and multiple notion of the public sphere.

From the field of communications and rhetoric theory, Gerard Hauser take the public sphere as «a discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment about them. It is the locus of emergence for rhetorically salient meanings» (Hauser, 1998: 21). For Hauser the public sphere is not just a theoretical conceptualization but also an historical construct that arose during the Greco-Roman period with the public engagement of individuals in the public life conducive to the formation of a sense of public opinion (1998: 22; 2001: 217). In his understanding, the rhetorical terms of the public sphere, the publics and the public opinion, have lost their intrinsic connection (Hauser, 2001). Goodnight (2012), also from communications theory, understands the public sphere as a realm for public argument. He distinguishes between a private, a technical and a public sphere. Exploring disagreements, he explains that arguments in the private sphere remain close to personal purposes and within personal relations, although those disputes occur in a public space. In the private sphere,

the statements made by the arguers to support the arguments remain ephemeral. In the technical sphere the conversation is preserved for analysis and the subject of disagreement will be narrowed down to the interest of a community of experts. When disagreements become a matter of public debate, then they enter the public sphere. He believes that the public sphere is being eroded by the pressure personal and technical discourses bring into the discourses of the greater good (Goodnight, 2012; Phillips, 1996).

The research is conceptually grounded on the aforementioned discussion of the public sphere as an arena for political deliberation and collective action. The research question together with this conceptual framework determined two criteria and indicators that frame the critical understanding of the relationships analysed. The first criteria of analysis deals with the process of production as both, a self-organized and an institutionalized process while the second criteria, deals with the public value of the practice, which relates to the interests and intentions of the actors involved (See table 1).

Concept	Critical Questions	Criteria	Indicators
Self-organization	How do practices of self-organization relate to institutionalized processes of public space production?	Interpretation of the source of production of practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which practices are self-organized by activists and civil society actors • Extent to which practices are made through institutionalized modes of public space production
Public value	To what extent do the different actors involved pursue common purpose through self-organization practices in the city?	Interpretation of public interests and intentions of stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which diverse government representatives relate to self-organization practices to pursue public purpose or private interests. • Extent to which civil society representatives pursue public purpose or private interests. through self-organization practices

Table 1. Criteria and indicators | Source: author’s own

This paper’s methodology draws on an interpretive paradigm of qualitative research. I chose the qualitative approach since my intention is to understand people’s perceptions, intentions and purposes and also because the research is exploratory by nature. Sixteen semi-structured interviews in relation to the *Mapocho Pedaleable* practice were conducted during fieldwork between December 2017 and May 2018 with civil society representatives,

activists, academics, planners, government representatives as well as current and former government authorities. These interviews are the main method used for the analysis and were selected from a wider number of interviews constituent of my PhD research.

Discussion: The dilemmas of self-organization

«So this is like a process of seduction (...) that worked, in this case, and that is not regulated, is not within any pattern of how the State works, is not within any scheme within the National Investment System, is politics. It's politics in its purest state, probably. In the sense that it is groups of people influencing an authority that has the power to do things» (Interviewee 33, Central Government Representative).

Castell's (2008) conceptualization of the public sphere as a cornerstone of democratic politics is inherent in the definition this interviewee gives to the *Mapocho Pedaleable* practice. The policy maker explains this self-organization process is opening up a space for citizens to influence an authority that has the power to do things; hence, prompting a reaction of the State to a need raised by citizens themselves. As a process of seduction between engaged citizens and State actors, this self-organization practice evidences the ambiguity resulting from the interaction among the different actors involved and their conflicting interests.

What are the motivations and intentions behind the relations established in temporary self-organization processes? Relationships and interactions are established to pursue common interests, yet, are concurrently overlapping with personal interests such as the capitalization of a civic idea. The purpose of these discussion is to explore and intend to disentangle the tensions among these motivations and the ambiguity of the interests at stake. The aim is to share some lessons from the *Mapocho Pedaleable* practice that can contribute to the local discussions and to more extensively conversations about terrains of ambiguity in the field of self-organization today.

To do so, the framework of analysis will be the basis for exploring the perceptions of civil society actors about the relationships established with the State and other institutional actors (and vice versa). These perceptions are critical to understand self-organization through the lens of the public sphere as an arena for political action.

The dilemmas of civil society

For driving the transformation of the river bank, activists and civil society leaders have shown interest in establishing connections with institutional actors and at the same time have expressed their desire of keeping autonomy in their collective actions. This constant tension is critical at different stages of the process and is revealed in the conflictive relations different civil society actors establish with diverse institutional actors such as specific academic organizations, local government representatives, and central government representatives, among others. The sought of institutional support by civic actors is recognized by them as critical to gain visibility and to scale-up the initiative, however when common interests are at stake, they cling to these, defending the autonomy of the self-organized practice.

During the early years of the process the initiators of the practice establish relations with the Center of Public Policies of Universidad Católica (CPP), and with the local municipalities of Santiago and Providencia, among others. The CPP provided institutional support in order to fulfil its mission of contributing to the Chilean development by linking academic work to public policies. The need of an institutional support for raising the awareness of the idea was recognized by one the creators of the initiative, yet, he also acknowledges that working within the umbrella of an academic institution changed the character of the practice by rigidifying it.

«We started working with the Center of Public Policies (CPP) to see how to make it visible, because at that time (...) we were two guys recently graduated from university, if we did not have a certain support this idea was not going to go further and they said they will put the institutional support (...) Well from that work with the CPP I think we institutionalized a bit the thing and we rigidified it as well. I think that it was there (...) when certain things were gained, but the spirit it had was also a little lost» (Interviewee 15, Civil Society Representative).

He further explains the loss of autonomy was manifested when they proposed the CPP to keep doing collective actions to occupy the river to show the potential use of the river, but the institution perceived those actions as a threat to the current negotiations taking place with policy-makers. The fear of losing autonomy, made *Mapocho Pedalable* creators take distance from the CPP once they achieved their goal of reaching the

interest of the Central Government in the project, specifically, of the Transportation Planning Secretariat (SECTRA). This search for autonomy, probably derived from the feeling of the activists of having been losing the collective nature of the project by the limitations imposed by the academic institution. Using Goodnight's conceptualization, the subject was narrowed down to the interest of a community of experts, or to a technical sphere, thus eroding the discussion initially brought to the public sphere when a group of citizens occupy the river.

«When the thing of SECTRA came out (...) we worked on the terms of reference for the tender, the tender was going to be published, there was nothing else to do, the Public Policy Center fulfilled its objective, thanks, see you (...) » (Interviewee 15, Civil Society Representative).

The two central municipalities, Santiago and Providencia, provide institutional support to the creators to carry out the events for opening the river to the public. The municipalities are described by some civil society representatives as partners or supporters of the initiative. Additionally, they are described as counterpart during the process of design triggered by CAF's support. They are never described as controllers the process. Consequently, the relationship of the activists and civil society group with the municipalities during the early years of the process was fluent. Through this process of production, the activists were articulating their autonomous views for influencing political institutions actions.

«The municipalities were a great logistical support in the opening of the river pilot and they put themselves at our disposition, they did not bring an image too preconceived of what the event should be, and I think gave us space for more or less set out what the purposes, the objectives, the aesthetics and the contents were and (also) they were counterparts in the study process» (Interviewee 10, Civil Society Representative).

In 2013, a less fluent and rather tense relationship was established with the Transportation Planning Secretariat. SECTRA was running a feasibility study with a private engineering consultancy firm, which evaluates it under traditional transportation planning logics. The discourse of questioning the logic under which the project is evaluated is recurrent among representatives of the activists and civil society groups. During this institutionalized process of production of the practice, the discursive space was

not a matter of public opinion but restricted to a technical sphere, which was claimed to be limited by the activists and far from their collective demands.

«The conflict in particular was that SECTRA took the project and begin to evaluate it under the wrong technocratic parameters, with a transport consultancy a project that is a social, urban construction on the most important river bank in the city. What does transport consultancy have to do in evaluating and almost pre-designing a bicycle highway? That's not what we were asking for!» (Interviewee 9, Civil Society Representative).

However, some not just question the type of study done but the type of relationship established with the State. Some of the leaders of the activist group, that originally proposed the *Mapocho Pedaleable* idea, participated on SECTRA's public tender process for doing the study without success. Consequently, they were not considered as counterparts of the study. However, a member of a civil society organization claims for a reciprocal process of engagement.

« (...) photos appeared in some social network and they (government representatives and private consultancy team) were all like checking the plans, in the river, with the helmets and we were in the office seeing this because nobody considered us as one (counterpart) ... although we had to show our work to the governments, the government did not show anything to us» (Interviewee 10, Civil Society Representative).

A few years later, when the regional government takes part of the initiative, the leadership of the institution was perceived by some civil society representatives as a natural step to get the project materialized in the future. However, some show awareness about the political capitalization of the Intendancy resulting from their participation in the process. Although civil society representatives perceive the administration support to the project as a result of its public value, they also perceive their interest derives from its understanding as an arena of communication, and therefore powerful connection to the formation of public opinion, advantageous for gaining political capital.

«I think the problems that are (...) in this initiative that is transformed into a project is that of course, the Administration becomes a participant but takes this project for their own benefit too, that is undoubted. Because in the end the *Mapocho Pedaleable* ends up being a very good showcase and a very good launching platform, from a media point of view inclusively (...) Then politics are

there, and it is perfect, it seems very good to me» (Interviewee 8, Civil Society Representative).

However, the leadership established by the regional government authority was seen by others as a way of making civil society organizations invisible to the process. Although this is not a generalized discourse among civil society representatives is key to expose it as it shows the complexity resulting from the established mutual relations.

«It seemed strange to us that he had not made any mention of anything previous of the project, rather than it was a citizen's idea. This said as a side note: the subject of the citizens was something that at first excited me but I have been realizing that several politicians use it as to blur or create a grey area like is no ones, as to say this is backed by people but for us it was a bit absurd when they said that things were done by the citizens, because it was like a way of making us invisible» (Interviewee 10, Civil Society Representative).

The complex relationship of the civic organizations with the Regional Government produces divisions between civil society representatives. Although they have similar perceptions about the leading role of the Intendancy in the final stages of the ongoing process of production, they have divided perceptions about the meaning of transferring power to the State institution.

«Now what is happening, of course here (in Santiago) always happens, that any good initiative (...) is absorbed by someone, in this case the Intendancy, and they are made as part of the project, but they are also made as the project's directors, and it's a little natural that it's like that» (Interviewee 8, Civil Society Representative).

The strong authority and control over the process of production of space by the Intendancy tensioned the relations with some of the Civil Society representatives provoking a conflict of legal connotations with the State institution. However, this was not a shared perception among the different activists and civil society representatives and consequently create internal divisions among them.

« (Santiago's governor) had his edition of the Mapocho Pedaleable in which he was like the country estate landlord (...) but basically he, they controlled everything, they were responsible (...), they asphalted over our asphalt, and well, there we had our controversy with him, we complained to him on social networks, we even sue him because we thought it was a bad precedent in the

work with social organizations» (Interviewee 10, Civil Society Representative).

The dilemma between reinforcing autonomy and collaborating with State institutions is an expression of conflicting interests and values; a manifestation of an inherently political process. What is at stake is how to establish relationships that without negating dissensus in the process of production of space, establishes mechanisms for dialogue and collaboration with a focus on public value. Having described the tensions from the perspective of activists and civil society representatives, what follows is the exploration of the tensions from the angle of the State actors.

The dilemmas of the State

State representatives perceive political leadership as key for making the proposed initiative flourish. Although acknowledging the leading role of civil society representatives in the process, a regional government representative perceives their role as key for scaling-up the impact of the initiative, claiming that without the State involvement the idea or project would not have succeeded into something else than an experiment.

«Mapocho Pedaleable is effectively driven by civil society but probably without the state joining it would still be in an experiment two days a year» (Interviewee 12, Regional Government Representative).

Moreover, a central government representative states that critical to the process was the leadership of a public authority, not only of a State institution. He explains that if the authority would have less interest or motivation in the issue the project will be probably lost going from one public institution to another.

«The project has raise its strength in the recent government, and I would say almost exclusively because there was an authority that is the governor which said I'm coming into play for this project. If that authority had not existed I do not know how much future the project would have had to reach the instances in which it is currently» (Interviewee 33, Central Government Representative).

Political capital gain is perceived by the government representatives as a form of gaining political support for driving the activist's initiative forward, rather than as perceived by some civil society representatives in the form of personal capital gain. Certain State representatives recognise public value is expanded

by the process of experimentation as they believe it is crucial for gaining public and political support.

« (...) this experimentation (...) virtuously part of a citizen initiative that occupies and colonizes a public space absolutely foreign to the city, then the state (...) continues with something more of temporality and experimentation, until we are in a position to say, and when I say conditions I do not only refer to normative, financial, but also political conditions. To which people say: Aha! This is what they want to do! Then (...) we dedicate this significant amount of resources because we understand what they (activists) are talking about. Otherwise, if these temporary and punctual interventions did not exist, there would never have been enough political capital to be able to approve it definitively» (Interviewee 12, Regional Government Representative).

A former public authority describes as paradoxical the conflict of legal connotations the Intendency has with some civil society representatives. The authority questions the public value of the *Mapocho Pedaleable* when treating the idea as a commodity. However, the implicit meaning he gives to the public is related to the 'pertaining to the State' meaning rather than to be a form of public deliberation.

«And that is paradoxical because there was a conflict with some of those who were originally involved in the issue, they demanded us because -of course, we want it to be an eternal pilot, we do not want it to be a definitive project- and when it is definitive, the idea was robbed. No way! It is a public idea. That is, you wanted to intervene in a public space, you made a pilot, you asked the State for help, the State helped you, took out the final project and today, of course, it's from the city, it's not yours. You cannot earn (money) with this project, because it's from the whole city» (Interviewee 12, Regional Government Representative).

The dilemma of providing leadership to build support to the initiative and gaining political capital is a double-edge sword. A predominant discourse relates to the gain political capital as a result from providing leadership and necessary for driving the transformative process. However, when raising political capital through the capitalization of civic processes or without the inclusion of the diverse actors interested in participating, the debate is detached from the public sphere; thus, the transformative potential of the practice weakened.

These discourses synthesized in figure 3 and linked with the framework of analysis show the ambiguity derived from the different actors' discourses and perceptions. This map is used strategically rather than theoretically to position the discourses

and tensions depicted through the discussion. For instance, the use of the concept ‘political capital gain’ has both positive and negative attributes. On one hand, it is understood as personal capitalization and on the other as a form for building political support on an initiative, thus differing in relation to the public value of the action. The discourse of a ‘citizen idea’, moreover, is perceived by some activists as a way to invisibilize them by an authority which commodifies a ‘civic action’. Nevertheless, State representatives perceive the ‘citizen idea’ as a public idea questioning the commodification of the idea by some of the activists. Therefore, both discourses attempt to question the loss of publicness yet from quite different perspectives. Looking to the ambiguity of the discourses through the lens of the public sphere is critical for exploring how to construct meaningful relations for enhancing the transformative potential of self-organized actions.

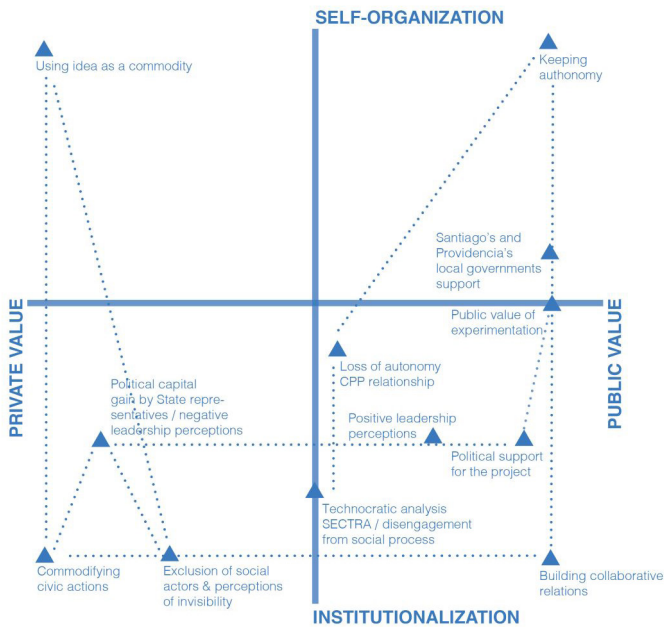


Figure3. Mapping discourses and tensions in relation to public value and self-organization.

Conclusion: The politics of self-organization

Analysing the motivations and controversies behind the relations established between different civic actors and State representatives in the process of *Mapocho Pedaleable* can trigger a learning

process to both State institutions and the community driving this self-organization process. It challenges us to think how to reconcile urban collective actions with State processes of production of public spaces.

The goal of this process of activism and self-organization was to reclaim the public value of a neglected public space in the city. This exploratory study has shown that for expanding the transformative potential of self-organized practices, the contributions of the different actors at play need to be valued and embraced. Although self-organization and institutionalization are presented strategically as two opposed poles, the key is to narrow the gap among them and find ways in which institutionalization of practices does not produce feelings of 'invisibleness' on civil society representatives, yet ones of inclusivity. In other words, ways in which to reinforce the autonomy of social organizations while building collaborative relations with institutional actors for pursuing common interests.

Self-organized practices have the potential to challenge the notion of a singular, comprehensive and codified notion of the public sphere while opening possibilities for a hybrid, inclusive and collective public sphere, in which a multiplicity of interests and publics come at play. As Nancy Fraser (1990) states, individual interests can be brought into the public sphere for deliberation. Nevertheless, if private interests conflict with public value, then the transformative potential of self-organized practices is weakened.

As Castell's argues, the State flows away from its public interests when limiting the participation of an active civil society. The dilemmas analysed through the paper shows the lack of mechanisms for bringing the State and social organizations to work together for the common good, and therefore, how this absence contributes to the erosion of the public sphere. I suggest if we want to expand the transformative potential of self-organization practices, we should seek to enhance forms of dialogue and collective collaboration for combining the interests and motivations of the different groups, focusing in the public value and working within the ambiguous boundaries between the public and the private.

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