



3<sup>rd</sup> EMES-Polanyi  
International Seminar

## EMES events

Welfare societies in transition  
Roskilde, 16-17 April 2018

ECSP-3EMESPolanyi-04

### Cultivating commons in the heart of the city. Madrid community gardens against austerity urbanism

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Roskilde, April 2018



Funded by the Horizon 2020 Framework  
Programme of the European Union

This article/publication is based upon work from COST Action EMPOWER-SE,  
supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

### 3rd EMES-Polanyi Selected Conference Papers (2018)

#### **Cultivating commons in the heart of the city. Madrid community gardens against austerity urbanism.**

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*A city is more than a place in space, it is a drama in time.* P. Geddes

Our societies are at a critical juncture, the multidimensional crisis that they are going through leads them to initiate eco-social transitions. Faced with this complex and difficult task, the idea of the commons has reappeared with force. A notion that has gained presence in philosophical, economic or legal debates (Negri, Ostrom, Federici, Mattei, Bollier, Bauwens, Mies, Lavielle, Stavrides, Laval y Dardot...); it has been used especially to denounce privatization processes or "new enclosures" and to name the alternative practices that are building alternative realities.

In the Southern European cities the *austerity urbanism* (Peck, 2012) is being confronted by an alternative social practices ecosystem inspired by the commons logic. In Madrid community gardens can be highlighted as an initiatives that have gone from illegality to the coproduction of public policies, linking social movements reclaims and municipalism.

#### **1. From traditional to new commons.**

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Traditional commons have been highly resilient, being able to manage in a sustainable and democratic way natural assets that were essential for the reproduction of communities (common forests and meadows, fishermen's guilds practising small-scale and sustainable fishing, collective-credit initiatives, irrigation practices). In Spain commons result in more than four million hectares of forest and mountains, thousands of artisanal fishermen organized in local guilds, peasant networks that protect their seeds in order to safeguard biodiversity or associations of irrigators (*comunidades de regantes* in Spanish) fostered by local governments and farmers, like the ancestral Water Court of Valencia.

Commons are a social relationship more than anything else, Antonio Lafuente would define them as a successful strategy of capacity building for a human group (Lafuente, 2010). An anthropologically and culturally adapted solution for sustainable and democratic management of strategic resources. Many words in different languages around the world reflect the community work inherent in commons: *minga* (Peru), *ayni* (Bolivia), *tequio* (Mexico), *auzolan* (Basque Country), *hacenderas* (Castilla), *andecha* (Asturias), *tornajeira* (Galicia), *tornallom* (Valencia), *coor* (Ireland), *mutirão* (Brazil)... These forms of management, adapted to different geographical and cultural contexts, helped to create synergies between territories, communities and economies that ensured the sustainable stewardship of certain resources.

Commons offer a way of organizing production, and what is more relevant a sense of belonging and collective identity, and provide some social cohesion to the peasant settlements. The management of these resources structured a peasant culture, these spaces hosted fairs and festivals, popular and sports games, social and religious events, becoming a key element for peasant sociality.

In the name of custom, a *moral economy* (Thompson, 1995) was articulated from these spaces, which placed the collective well-being above the individual benefit and the meeting of community needs over economic rationalization. They did not guarantee a redistribution of wealth produced in a territory, they only guarantee access to these goods by a part of the population, especially the most vulnerable groups (poor, women...).

The capitalism expansion introduced a change in economic logic, which Max Weber summed up by stating that the questions that sought to solve the old economic order, based on land and common goods, and those to be solved by the emerging capitalism, were qualitatively different:

“[...] Where the traditional economy wondered how can I give work and sustenance to the greatest number of men with this piece of land? Capitalism asks: how can I produce as many crops as possible for the market using as few men as possible?” (Weber, 1987)

Although the social innovation that the commons represent must be highlighted, it is not advisable to retrospectively idealize the past. It would be misleading to fall into the description of feudalism as a rural democracy where a primitive egalitarian economy prevailed.

These customary practices in the organization of thousands of peasant and indigenous societies have remained cornered for decades in the margins of our societies until, in recent years, they have been gaining prominence in the hand of social movements.

The resource, the defined community and the rules of governance are an inseparable reality as Ostrom (1990) has studied in different contexts throughout the world. The features shared by the societies she studied usually refer to rural environments, with a small population, predominantly face to face social relations, and where social reproduction was linked to the reproduction of resources and the participation was an imperative. Following its exhaustive investigations, the main rules that would define the operation of the common goods would be:

1. Clear specification of the limits. The people who have the right to extract the resource and the resource itself must be clearly specified and delimited
2. Coherence between local conditions and the rules of appropriation and collaboration. The appropriation rules that limit the moment, the site, the technology and/or the amount of the resource that can be extracted.
3. Agreements on collective decisions. The majority of the individuals affected by the operating rules can participate in the modification of them.
4. Supervision and control of compliance with the rules.
5. Provision of sanctions.
6. Mechanisms for the resolution of conflicts.
7. Minimum recognition of the right to self-organize. The rights of users to design their own institutions are not threatened by external governmental authorities.

Commons can be considered as experiences arising from need by centuries of practice, which invite us to investigate the lessons learned from initiatives that dealt with the conflict of collective organization, power management or territory stewardship in terms of socio-environmental sustainability. Inspiring practices that have come to the present, claiming their validity and their need to reinvent themselves in order to adapt to other geographic, cultural, economic and environmental contexts. The "new commons" have been emerging during the last decades, like practices that are trying to close (politic, food, energy) cycles in a certain territory, helping to democratize fragments of the world. Groups that develop different forms of production (solidarity based economy, cooperative work, fair trade, cooperatives for an energy transition, agro-ecological and seeds networks...), learning (teaching cooperatives, cooperative schools...), coexistence (social centres, community gardens, cooperative forms of organizing care, housing cooperatives, recovery of abandoned villages...), taking care of themselves (mutual societies, health cooperatives, parenting groups...), and relating to new technologies so that they are accessible and not commercialized (free software, free culture...); in short, new institutions capable of sustaining and making other lifestyles desirable.

New commons translate some of their features and management mechanisms into advanced industrial environments, urban spaces, densely populated, with a strong implementation of the State and with a predominance of weaker social ties. The rise of individualism during the last decades has eroded the ability of people to cooperate (Sennet, 2016). Fragility of territorial ties, growing social inequality, prevailing competitiveness or changes in work models with an increase in turnover, instability and precariousness, make it difficult to establish bonds of trust with other people. A dynamic that discourages the personal effort involved in engaging in cooperative dynamics, which requires a considerable amount of time and the establishment of rituals to develop these skills. Thinking of human groups that perform complex tasks

collectively, from a football team to a symphony orchestra, gives an idea of the hours of training and rehearsal needed for their accomplishment.

Borders of shared resources in the new commons, their appropriation processes, and the community of users involved in their maintenance, are more complex to define than that of traditional commons (Parker and Johansson 2011). Although over time communities have never been compartmentalized and have maintained translocal relationships, the subsistence of communities linked to new commons does not depend on the collective and sustainable preservation of these resources. This does not mean that users would not obtain some kind of benefit (economic, social or political), but that beyond the use of the resource for their own subsistence, there are other motivations that are more present, whether they are of a civic, political or environmental nature (Castro Coma and Martí Costa 2016). Finally, regulatory frameworks and the structure of ownership in urban spaces require negotiation and cooperation processes with local governments, and community access refers mainly to governance or management, and not so much to ownership of the resources (Barthel et al. 2010).

The practices of the new commons point to open debates and tensions (table 1).

Table 1. Traditional commons and new commons characteristics.

<b>Traditional commons</b>	<b>New Commons</b>
Rural areas.	Urban areas.
The borders and limits of the community were very clear.	In more liquid, open and elective societies, criteria for belonging to the community and to access to the uses and rights of new commons, are more flexible.
The participation was compulsory to satisfy primary necessities and to gain access to collective rights.	The participation is more flexible and the needs satisfied are less primary (participation, culture, safety...).
The traditional commons supposed a moral economy (Thompson, 1994) that guaranteed the survival of the most vulnerable groups.	New commons are mostly linked to a middle class social composition. They have difficult to link with most disadvantaged social and ethnic minority groups.
The commons were pre-capitalist practices.	New commons work inside capitalism decommercializing spaces and practices. They are outlines of post-capitalist socio-economic practices.
Gender or economic inequalities embeded the governance of these practices.	New commons give more attention to gender and incorporate care dynamics of the human groups but also embeded the gender or economic inequalities .
Autonomous practices, operating beyond the market and beyond the state, focusing on collective property	There is a continuity between public goods and new commons, or public-state and public-community relationships.
The commons were sustainable practices for strategic resources for the	New commons can also be considered practices aimed to short economic and political circuits and

community social reproduction. Local solutions to a local problem.	to reduce the ecological footprint. Local inputs into global crisis.
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The main virtue of the updating of the reflections on the commons is that it broadens the field of politics, warning about the statecentrism of speeches and emancipatory practices, and the false rationality of the market as an efficient allocator of resources. In a context of energy crisis, climate change, increased inequality or growing political disaffection towards representative liberal systems, expressed in the form of outrage in the streets or in the rise of the extreme right, they leave us no margin: citizens are initiating a transition that cannot be postponed.

Commons and new commons cannot offer an all-encompassing narrative of social change. But they do invite the contestation of authoritarian institutions and neoliberal drifts, the construction of new practices based on a greater social role and the joint claim of a habitable planet for the human species.

## **2. Green commons and community gardens.**

Since its origin in the 70s in the USA, community gardens have been conceived as *neighbourhood commons* (Linn 2009). Meeting spaces that intensified the social relations of the inhabitants in the degraded areas or disadvantaged neighbourhoods, through the involvement of the people in the design, construction and management of these areas. Local communities are not urban or economic structure determined they are deliberately constructed groups, the result of social practices. The construction of neighbourhood commons is a key exercise in shaping these communities of interests in urban environments through their involvement in collective actions.

Community gardens, as a typology of *urban green commons* (Colding and Barthel 2013) contribute to urban resilience building, so that when community management is continued over time, processes of recovery, generation and transmission of social-ecological memory have been identified (Barthel et al. 2010; Barthel et al. 2015) collecting knowledge adapted to the place and lost for most of the citizens. This presents a potential for the development of new forms of ecological urban management, which recognize, integrate and coordinate diverse knowledge.

Community gardens call into question centralized and expert practice in urban design, claiming citizen relevance and also incorporating the agro-ecological dimension, proposing the quality of urban life in terms of interdependence between people and ecodependence with nature (Riechmann 2012).

Spaces devoted to urban agriculture, beyond food production, fulfill ecological and social functions that contribute to increase quality of life, resilience and sustainability of urban areas. The insertion of orchards in the urban space contributes to close metabolic cycles in proximity, to improve the urban environment (Langemeyer et al. 2016; Aubry and Pourias 2013) and to increase biodiversity (Speak et al. 2015). They also foster social interaction, social cohesion, mutual support and the formation of networks; enabling intergenerational and intercultural relations; they increase the sense of ownership and responsibility for open spaces, and

facilitate processes of identity and empowerment of communities (Kingsley and Townsend 2006; Firth et al. 2011; Camps-Calvet et al. 2015). They are also an instrument of ecological awareness, helping to make visible processes that in highly urbanized environments are not easily appreciated, such as the seasonality of crops or the production of food itself (Viljoen and Bohn 2014). Additionally they improve the urban landscape, revitalizing degraded spaces, creating new local centralities, and becoming part of the network of open spaces and green infrastructure (Arredondo 2013; Breuste 2010). Finally, they present a socio-political dimension, related to the reflection on the urban model and the management of common resources.

### **3. Austerity urbanism and 15M movement.**

The 2008 financial collapse meant the end of the illusion of a model of economic growth progressively disconnected from the satisfaction of social needs, which in Spain has been characterized by a model of land management subordinated to speculation and accumulation of wealth. The urban policies have been deeply conditioned by the real estate sector, one of the main sources of municipal financing. After the outbreak of the financial crisis, the cities have concentrated the most dramatic socio-economic impacts (indebtedness, evictions, unemployment, energy poverty, deterioration of public services...), which have led to a strong loss of social cohesion and a strong increase in inequality.

This process was aggravated by the application of an austerity urbanism (Peck 2012) that opened the door to the private sector in service provision and management, giving it an ever more important role in the definition of strategic guidelines for urban transformation. This restructuring of urban policies (Sevilla 2015) is based on processes such as the promotion of megaprojects and mega-events, public-private partnerships (PPPs), opening up the most interesting sectors to foreign investment, uneven public service provision depending on the purchasing power of different neighbourhoods, gentrification, and the commodification of sectors such as environmental management, green areas or even the public space itself.

Investors, property developers and large corporations have driven the creeping commodification of the city, with the result that markets – disconnected from social needs and free from political oversight – determine the direction taken by urban governments. And citizens have suffered the dramatic consequences: market authoritarianism and the erosion of local democracies, booming corruption, an increase in environmentally unsustainable processes and an exponential growth in inequality.

A dynamic that has been especially aggressive in the countries of Southern Europe. This cyclical movement throughout history has provoked the activation of society's self-protection mechanisms, in what Polanyi defined in "The Great Transformation" as a 'double movement' (Polanyi 2007). The threat of a free-market utopia capable of re-politicizing everyday life and deploying multiple alternative projects aimed at subordinating the economy to politics.

The official crisis narrative begins to be questioned in the public sphere with the 15M irruption, inaugurating the most intense collective action cycle in our recent history. A protest whose radicalism has been to re-signify the notion of democracy, recover lost sociability and disobey

the mandate to dissolve into individualistic resignation. The iconic image would be the Puerta del Sol and Plaza Catalunya camps, because among the tents and under the canvas awnings, micro-cities were set up in the heart of the big city, a kind of glimpse of other possible cities. Fragile collective architectures were built with recycled materials, giving rise to an improvised urbanism of kindness and care, reserving spaces for children's areas, libraries, computers, dining rooms, solar panels and orchards. These camps and assemblies in which thousands of people lived together, more than new political organizations, generated new forms of relationship and a new atmosphere more prone to social change.

The camps were a metaphor for another way of conceiving and inhabiting the city that would be deployed throughout the territory, re-signifying old practices and promoting new ones. Among the diverse and heterogeneous dynamics that emerged there, we will focus on those that have been mechanisms of social self-defense, which are simultaneously helping to meet basic needs and to recover the damaged social ties of urban environments. Struggles against evictions and the recovery of buildings carried out by the PAH (*Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca*, or Platform for the affected by mortgage), community food pantries for families in vulnerable situations, neighbourhood networks against the health exclusion of immigrants, "citizen's tides" for the protection of public services (thematic demonstrations related to education, health, social services... where citizens and professionals converged), recovery of buildings to construct social centres or occupation of vacant plots to cultivate community gardens. A diverse ecosystem of initiatives driven by neighbourhood entities, neighbourhood assemblies or citizen's platforms.

Responses that have been actively ignored and underestimated by the large institutions, but that suppose the outline of a cooperative urbanism, intensive in citizen protagonism and in more democratic ways of understanding the public. Innovative initiatives that start up from a substrate of social cooperation, which arise from living processes rather than from impervious models and administratively formalized institutions, and do so not in a restricted way, but with an emphasis on the democratization of social and economic relations. It is not a new political philosophy, but rather, a practice that develops transitions to other economic and political systems.

Initiatives that transform people's lives through experience and simultaneously promote radical changes on a small scale. Like the real utopias, investigated in half world by Erik Olin Wright (2014), where the pragmatically possible is not independent of our imagination, but, on the contrary, takes shape from our visions of reality and our ways of inhabiting it in a different way.

#### **4. Municipalism, a walking paradox.**

2015 municipal elections channeled the desire for political change of an intensely mobilized society. The government of some of the most important Spanish cities (Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Zaragoza, A Coruña, Cadiz...) went to hybrid candidacies composed of new political parties such as Podemos, traditional left parties and people from social movements.

A complex formula that does not respond to conventional party structures, an anomaly in Europe, whereby people with strong anchors in local citizen movements and left or green parties coordinate work together to govern the institutions. This movement is about much



more than bringing a progressive agenda to city hall, demands move forward with policies about deep local selfgovernment, participatory democracy, municipalized economics, social justice and ecology. Municipalism faces the challenge of managing high expectations and translating many of the social movements' demands into public policies, while fulfilling their responsibilities to govern for all citizens. They have the task of recovering the local government as an institution that guarantees rights for the social majorities and for the common good, facing all the institutional inertias and all the bureaucratic obstructions; challenging, through fragile and unstable majorities with traditional parties, a legal architecture designed to prevent change.

After two years of exploring the institutional tools, a turn of the wheel can be seen, albeit a slow one. Indeed, it takes a long time for large institutions to show a change of direction. Municipalism is deepening in participatory democracy, transparency and especially in the change of public policy priorities (fight against social inequality and territorial imbalances, focus on rights such as food, housing or energy). Transformations in the background and in the form, because municipalism is also opening space for emerging issues, which were absent from the political agendas (public-social cooperation, solidarity economy, care, sustainable consumption and public procurement...), activating innovative mechanisms such as coproduction of public policies. The situation has changed from a "political fiction" scenario, because arriving at the current situation seemed an unattainable chimera, to another one of "political friction", that requires to deal with contradictions inside and outside the institutions, and to assume that diverse frictions are going to take place. Frictions within the established powers when trying to apply the committed programs of democratic regeneration and social transformation, which will involve taking bold and risky measures that must necessarily be socially supported and sustained. Frictions between institutions and social movements, due to strategic and procedural questions, spaces and times. Frictions, finally, within the associative dynamics, related to disagreements about how to take a stand on every day conflicts... A delicate situation that requires enough political intelligence to know how to address conflicts without falling into confrontation.

The political scientist Benjamin Barber used to provocatively assert that mayors should govern the world, a way of recognizing the relevance of local governments as institutions of proximity, attached to the urgency of solving "problems in capitals with governments in lowercase" (Subirats, 2015) and as privileged spaces for political experimentation. Municipalism of the "city councils of change" is a walking paradox, discomforting to central government powers and business interests, but also to local counter-powers; who are obliged to leave the comfort zone, abandon the logic of resistance and accept a change in their identity that will enable them to play a leading role in a scenario where securing new rights becomes feasible.

Moreover, it is not absurd to affirm that local powers have the potential to become counterpowers within the institutional architecture, beyond their innovative policies, when they are articulated to curb harmful state policies or international agencies (related to refugees, right of migrants, climate change, historic memory...). In Spain, the central government anticipated to this possibility in 2013 promoting legislation aimed at reducing municipal autonomy. The so-called Montoro Law establishes an unprecedented cut of powers to municipalities, limiting the services that can be provided by local corporations and overseeing their economies. All because municipalism shows other ways of governing, outlining

alternative accounts of reality and successfully implementing other political agendas, with all its conflicts and contradictions. These "cities of change" are in a singular and paradoxical position between the pragmatism of the moment and the utopian impulse to bring about change. They are giving life to a space where it is possible to create more suitable ecosystems and environments for the experiments that are autonomously prefiguring another society. These local governments facilitate, support, and strength new forms of social institutions.

This limited experience demonstrates that the viability of the urban commons will be challenged in their capacity to generate an expanded public notion, more in effective appropriation than in claiming a new property statute. The urban commons open the door to an autonomous appropriation of the public at neighbourhood scale, which is a comprehensible space. A friendly scale, according to the environmental psychologist A. Moles, who related the spatial distance with the variables of the cognitive domain, the possibilities of space control, the effort invested in this process and the presence of other people. The area where these variables converge, that is, where significant spatial and cognitive control is maintained, where there is a high presence of other people and where the effort to intervene is still low, corresponds to the neighbourhood scale (Moles and Rohner 1975).

The neoliberal city is being developed by alliances between the market and traditional institutions, which under the figure of public-private partnerships have endowed the business sector with a great influence when it comes to defining the city's transformation strategies (urban planning, privatization of services, delimitation of investment areas, commercialization of public space...), increasing both social inequalities and territorial imbalances, as well as the environmental unsustainability of the model.

Reversing this dynamic involves weaving processes of public-community collaboration, intensive in citizen protagonism, capable of implementing a new urban agenda that participatively addresses the needs of disadvantaged people and neighbourhoods, reorienting economic models towards social justice and ecological transition (Casadevante and Martínez 2017). A sequence that requires strengthening the existing urban commons (urban gardens, social centres, community pantries, neighbourhood management of cultural and sports facilities, consumer groups, spaces for shared parenting, housing cooperatives, renewable energy, work...) and testing the scaling up of the commons logic to the municipal management of strategic resources (water, energy, food, waste management, care and attention to people...).

Steps are being taken in that direction in some Spanish cities. The City Council of Madrid is beginning to explore a public-social cooperation framework, and additionally is elaborating a regulation for the assignment of public spaces and resources to non profit entities for their community management, such as foundations, associations, organizations and neighbourhood entities, or even social economy companies concerned about the general interest and the common good. In addition, a category of urban use related to the common has begun to be discussed, which serves to recognize collective uses in regulations related to urban plans. In Barcelona, there is a more or less consolidated trajectory of assignment of public spaces to citizen management through regulations such as the so-called "civic management". This extension of the assignment of spaces to groups rooted in the territory comes from an organized neighbourhood demand, which on multiple occasions had pointed out how free

competition processes for the assignment of management of publicly owned facilities privileged the private sector. Currently this regulation is being revised, since it operates with a high degree of discretion and does not guarantee that dimensions such as proximity, social benefit or territorial roots of the actors that manage the facilities had more weight than conventional economic indicators.

## **5. Planting tomatoes and harvesting social relations: community gardens.**

Post 15M, when neighbourhood assemblies in Spain started to work on their local environments, they often developed community garden projects. This has happened from Madrid and Barcelona to Burgos or Málaga, where the very name of the gardens reflects those origins: Horts Indignats in Barcelona, Huerta Dignidad in Málaga (in reference to the 2014 Marches for Dignity). Community gardens emerged as one of many forms of protest against the upset caused by the neoliberal global city and its urbanicidal dynamics (too many institutions and not enough government, exclusion and the dual labour market, the politics of fear, deteriorating public services, unsustainability and so forth). Urban gardens have become means to denounce speculation and demand a new culture of the territory. They have also enabled the creation of social and economic alternatives linking a wide range of social actors and collectives, from green activist groups to unemployed people's assemblies, from neighbourhood associations to popular solidarity networks.

This movement reveals and raises questions that go beyond the gardens themselves, calling on people to participate and share responsibility for our lifestyles and how we manage resources that are located beyond the city limits but are essential for the city's subsistence in a context of social and ecological crisis, exemplified by climate collapse and the energy crisis.

One of the strengths that give the community gardens their radical nature and transformative capacity is their goal of creating a community in the broad sense, sharing and collectively managing resources (soil, seeds, water, tools), obtaining certain benefits (harvests, social recognition), and conforming a group of people who define their own rules and form of organization.

The neighbourhood is that sphere between the productive and the reproductive, between the private, known, domestic space and the public space, comprising the larger, more abstract city that cannot be encompassed in its totality. In the community gardens, the sense of belonging to the neighbourhood is defined culturally rather than geographically, seeking to involve and appeal to neighbours whose definition as a group is likewise flexible, as it refers to people who work collectively in the neighbourhood and not so much to their place of residence.

Agroecology, self-management and social ties are the three features that define the community gardens meaning at the local level, where people grow food and harvest social relationships. Because they are in the public space, the community gardens are highly visible, attractive experiences, and very active in making connections with other initiatives (community centres, neighbourhood associations, consumer groups, cyclists' collectives, education associations and schools, for instance), which means that they reweave the local social fabric. As time goes by, the meeting space and relationships with other people become key to the group's cohesion and competes in attractiveness with the gardening dimension, which was initially more relevant.

As well as the immediate activity, the community gardens prefigure what people would like their city to look like in the future, expressing the need for neighbourhoods that are more participatory together with the introduction of an eco-urbanism approach (sustainable transport, proximity, renewable energies, composting, closing cycles).

*Hortodiversity*, that is to say, the diversity of urban gardens due to their different locations, promoter groups, and motivations behind them, defines their key characteristic when compared to traditional green spaces (Table 2). Every garden reflects the community that grows it, and the place in which is located, and thus everyone is radically different from another.

Table 2. Public spaces and community gardens' characteristics

Public space	Community garden
Uses limited to those planned.	Versatile. Enable emerging and non planned uses.
Private or public management. Restrictive regulations based on civility.	Community management, co-responsibility.
Centrally built space.	Self-constructed.
Professional design (technicians, architects, urban planners...).	Self-reflective design, integrating multiple technical and experience-based knowledges.
Progressively commodified.	Demonetarised.
Space that causes aloofness and estrangement.	Appropriated space.
Citizen as user.	Citizen as designer, builder, gardener, manager, user...
Conceived in a homogeneous and deterritorialized way (infrastructure, morphology, plants...)	Highly adapted to the plot characteristics (infrastructure, morphology, plants).
Mainly built with new materials.	Mainly built with re-used or recycled materials.

Source: Fernández Casadevante and Morán (2015).

## 6. From Madrid to the ground.

The community gardens were born in local communities that organized to regenerate degraded urban spaces on a small scale by occupying abandoned properties, spaces between buildings or underused green areas. These empty spaces once again became inhabited, combining a modest reconstruction of the site, emphasizing the usage value of the urban space, with a relational rehabilitation that seeks to restore the quality of the space by intensifying social relations (organizing activities such as street parties, community meals or cultural initiatives).

The protest side of the gardens was there from the beginning, revealing how far urban development policies and expert knowledge have diverged from the needs and aspirations of the city's inhabitants. The action of occupying the space reflects the absence of ways to engage in a fruitful dialogue with local institutions, and reclaims the right of communities and citizens

to take ownership of the public space and apply “collaborative planning and management practices to recreate it and think about what it should look like in the future”.

### *6.1 History*

The community gardens movement began in Spain at the start of the twenty-first century with a few isolated initiatives taken forward by neighbourhood associations and ecologists, who by 2010 had set up coordination networks such as the Red de Huertos Urbanos Comunitarios de Madrid (RED). Since the 15-M movement in 2011 many neighbourhood assemblies have been setting up gardens in different areas of Madrid, definitively locating this issue in the public sphere and putting it on the political agenda.

The RED serves to raise the profile of all the initiatives, encourage the exchange of experiences (visits, meeting), share resources (seed nursery, seed exchange, buying manure collectively), create mutual support mechanisms and promote training events (learning days, courses), as well as offering a resource space that can provide advice and support to people and groups interested in taking forward new initiatives.

Right from the start, the instability inherent in the occupation of land and the scarcity of resources led the RED to seek dialogue with the Madrid City Council, in order to regularize the status of the gardens and push for the launch of a municipal programme that would enable them to form part of the city’s green infrastructure on a permanent basis.

Between internal tensions and lengthy assembly meetings, sites being dismantled and occupied, protests and photo exhibitions, support from universities and international recognition (UN-HABITAT’s Good Practice Award for Urban Sustainability), the RED gained legitimacy as an interlocutor in negotiations.

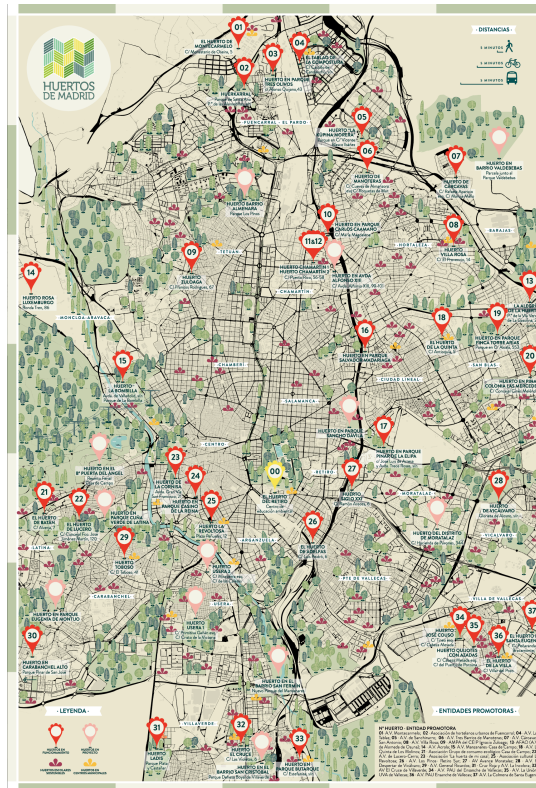
Following a lengthy hard bargaining with one of Spain’s most neoliberal municipal governments, the status of the first 17 community gardens was regularized in 2014. The gardens are located on sites categorized as green areas, and the right to use them is awarded in a public bidding process. In the list of terms and conditions a balance has been struck between respect for the uniqueness of citizen initiatives and their autonomy, while offering legal security to the City Council, in an innovative procedure that could be replicated in other cities.

This major victory was won after exploring the shifting sands of dialogue with the city government, without dying in the attempt, proposing new forms of engaging with state institutions from positions of conflict and not just confrontation, eventually progressing towards dialogue and even cooperation. This giant step has enabled the community agriculture initiatives in the capital to consolidate and in just a few years to increase to nearly 60 regularized projects today.

The community garden map is the opposite of a tourist map, which shows only the city centre, because the low-income neighbourhoods predominate, especially those on the outskirts where most initiatives are concentrated. In the city centre, where urban development is denser, it is much more difficult to find a physical space. Even so, the decisive variable is the thick social and

neighbourhood fabric that the gardens require, which is more likely to be found in outlying neighbourhoods.

Graph 1. Map of community gardens in Madrid



The institutionalization process is in the early stages and is gradually becoming consolidated, respecting the autonomy and non-party-political nature of the initiatives. In addition, since a municipalist coalition took over the City Council in 2015 further steps have been taken, advancing the joint development of public policies aimed at recognizing and maximizing the creativity and collective intelligence in our cities, involving citizens and the social fabric in designing and implementing policies that concern them.

This has led to the regularization of more gardens, including those located on non-residential land on a temporary basis, the building of the Municipal Urban Gardening School, consolidating a training plan to support community gardens jointly managed by the Red de Huertos, and the launch of a pilot project for community agro-composting.

## 6.2. Organization

The community gardens are organized as an assembly, where proposals are made and important decisions are taken. They also operate with working groups that are set up to coordinate specific tasks. Alongside these, are informal mechanisms based on thematic leadership – the person who knows about the specific topic and can take the initiative decides how to do it – and decision-making by those who are most often present in the space.

The work draws on the knowledge and experience of all the members, creating a climate of knowledge-sharing and ongoing, collective knowledge-production in response to the problems that arise.

Tasks tend to be organized depending on each person's preferences and knowledge, although there are mechanisms to ensure that people take turns to do the most unpleasant ones – such as sweeping or stirring the compost.

The harvest – a motivation more symbolic than material – is divided among everyone present and is seldom a source of conflict. However, care is taken to ensure that it is shared out fairly. On one occasion, an older man broke a bone in his foot while working in the garden and was unable to go back for some time, but his share of each harvest was set aside for him and someone would take it to his house since his work had helped to grow the vegetables.

Some initiatives collect modest cash contributions from members, although people who cannot afford to pay are not excluded from joining the project. Others raise funds by making food or selling merchandise – badges, canvas bags, etc.– as well as by collecting voluntary individual contributions.

The practice of urban ecological agriculture is often the main initial attraction. Later, working and spending time with other people means that relationships tend to become more important than the vegetable-growing tasks as such. Gradually, a network of relationships is woven and encourages solidarity and mutual support.

Of course, as in any social setting, there are disagreements and disputes over how to manage the space or do the work, or because of misunderstandings. However, conflict is not usually seen as something to avoid, but rather an issue to be addressed. This is why some gardens in Madrid have developed their own regulations for dealing with conflict, and even make use of mediation processes through the RED.

### *6.3. From islands of green to an archipelago*

The difference between a group of islands and an archipelago is the existence of connections between them. Thus, once the gardens had put down roots in the neighbourhoods and become part of the social ecosystem, they and the RED focused on building bridges, gaining more allies, linking up with other campaigns and coordinating with other actors on various scales.

The advocacy work done by the community garden goes beyond their own neighbourhoods and their influence extends to the city as a whole, where they are making their own specific contribution to changing the urban model.

These projects are involved in multiple mobilization networks both at the urban and the translocal scale, linked to citizen participation, food sovereignty and agroecology. In 2015, the RED coordinated the First National Meeting of Urban Community Gardens. The ultimate aim is to transcend their own neighbourhood and become involved in a wider movement by connecting these islands to others, eventually consolidating ever-expanding archipelagos that break the bounds of established institutional structures and dominant practices.

## 7. Seeding another urban futures

Madrid's community gardens have gained significant symbolic power as metaphors for social creativity, for citizens' capacity to give abandoned spaces back their use value, for caring for nature in the city, and for the building of alternatives by autonomous citizens.

As well as mobilizing alternative ideas and becoming a means of protest, the community gardens have been a valid practical way to bring the organizational dynamics and critical discourses developed by the 15-M movement to neighbourhoods and municipalities. They are also fostering connections between the various pre-existing group or neighbourhood processes, thus diversifying their participant profile thanks to their constructive and inclusive nature.

Locally, the community gardens bring together a range of feelings, demands and claims (environmental, neighbourhood, political, relational), while simultaneously stimulating processes of neighbourhood self-management that place emphasis on direct participation, taking ownership of the space, the rebuilding of identities and the shared responsibility of the community as a whole for the different issues that affect the people who live there.

These exercises in micro-urbanism express people's disagreement with the dominant model of the city and the lifestyles it induces.

Community gardens are an expression of the emergence of a cooperative urbanism, intensive in citizen leadership and more democratic ways of understanding the public sphere. The gardens imply processes of urban rehabilitation, both in the form of small-scale material changes and, especially, in the form of relational rehabilitation, in how links are developed among people and between people and their surroundings.

Community gardens act on the production and transformation of the urban space through their impact on human relationships and lifestyles rather than via major works of physical refurbishment.

A habitable counter-power is one that allows people to experience in the here and now the major features of the future life to which we aspire, a process of immanent transformation that cannot be reduced to strategic calculations regarding the accumulation of forces and irreversible revolutions.

The anarchist Paul Goodman used to say: "Suppose you had the revolution you are talking and dreaming about. Suppose your side had won, and you had the kind of society that you wanted. How would you live, you personally, in that society? Start living that way now!"

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