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The effects of the pandemic on spaces and projects that promote community management of culture

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The spaces for community management of culture are a particular form of urban cultural commons aimed at promoting a participatory approach to cultural emancipation, but they are also very active environments with regard to the governance of local ecosystems in favour of economic democratisation, community resilience and eco-social education. In this article, based on the analysis of content from different discussion groups held during the 2021, we will try to grasp how the Barcelona ecosystem of community cooperation projects related to the management of culture has suffered the effects of the crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. The proposals that this sector is articulating can have impacts on cultural policies, and they seek the construction of a normative framework that recognises community management legally and also appeals to other areas of public policy.

Introduction

We can regard many different elements as cultural commons, for example, customs, laws, ways of dressing, architectural style, social standards, religious beliefs or traditions. They are social practices or symbolic elements, which have a pragmatic aspect but, at the same time, a heavy ideological burden, which can act as common assets that are not owned by anyone yet, at the same time, are the heritage of everyone who recognises them as such. Assets that are protected and reproduced to the extent that people who use or practise them particularly value and protect them by grouping around organisations and institutions for this purpose. Commons are defended and vindicated through collective self-organisation.

Among the cultural commons, nowadays, especially in the urban context, community management cultural spaces and projects represent a very heterogeneous and rich system in terms of the use of material resources and infrastructures in the service of access and equity in the right to local culture. But not only that as evidenced by the consolidation of the Network of Community Spaces (XEC)¹.

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1. This article compiles knowledge and observations framed in a project promoted by the Training and Publications Commission and the Network of Community Spaces of the Solidarity Economy Network of Catalonia. The project culminates with a collectively authored book, edited by Eizaguirre, S. and Rodrigo, J. (2022) and published by the Icària publishing house. “Perquè tot és de tothom. Gestió comunitària de la cultura i economia solidària”. [Because everything belongs to everyone. Community management of culture and the solidarity economy].

Culture community management spaces have a heavy ideological burden because, at the same time, they invoke their environments to articulate a sociopolitical movement that defends very specific values and resources, within the reach of everyone and, especially, in contact with the territory, which respond to an ideology of economic democratisation, eco-social transition and defence of the right to life and the city.

Thus, we can say that culture community management spaces and projects represent, on the one hand, a model of participatory management of cultural facilities, resources and services, but, much more than that, they are conceived as a pro-commons sociopolitical movement in a sense that goes beyond the strictly cultural sphere.

It is in this sense that beyond representing a breakthrough with regard to public procurement in the management of local cultural facilities and services, the community management spaces of culture can be regarded as nodes of democratic empowerment that are vital in addressing the multiple eco-social crises we face.

1. The impact of the pandemic on participatory cultural intervention practices

In research sponsored by the Barcelona Institute of Culture and coordinated by the cooperatives La Hidra and ArtiBarri in 2018, under the direction of Javier Rodrigo and Mauro Castro, a delimitation of the community management of culture in Barcelona was developed that explored four broad areas of attention: community culture, so-called new community management spaces, local facilities in culture, and popular and community festivals. In this article, in order to grasp how the pandemic has impacted community culture projects in the city, we think it is useful to look at the first two types or categories identified by this reference study, taking into account that they mention two groups of players that are very closely interrelated and, at the same time, complementary. On the one hand, the professionals of the sociocultural and community sector, including participatory projects of artistic intervention, and on the other hand, the citizen platforms that promote the community management of culture, which, in many ways, are nourished by the former, but, at the same time, have their own logic of operation.

For the "community culture" category, which would be the one that mainly speaks of professional players in the socio-educational, cultural and community field, this research carried out in 2018 included as examples art projects with a participatory perspective, such as the "Barris en dansa" [Dancing neighbourhoods] programme. It also included in this section community culture initiatives developed through cultural groups or associations, such as, for example, Comusitària and Riborchestra, in the Ribera neighbourhood. Many of these are experiences that respond to a community-type artistic model according to collective authorship models in which district technical reference figures directly intervene, especially in the areas of participation, youth or education. The third sector initiatives in the field of sociocultural practices and community arts, as well as the grassroots community culture spaces, with strong roots in the territories, would be part of this first type of experience reported by Castro and Rodrigo (2018): The Forn de teatre Pa'tot'hom, in the Raval, or L'automàtica, in Gràcia, would be examples. Also included in this group of structures would be the culture and citizenship laboratories that work in the framework of local facilities and which develop community mediation programmes in the territory and which respond to their own needs of generating a social return, such as the Bon Viver de les Arts programme, in Bon Pastor².

2. Castro and Rodrigo (2018) characterise these initiatives as microenterprises supporting the burden of many different activities. They work with the timing of specific programmes in which networking with different players and co-design with comprehensive neighbourhood, community health or educational-type plans are highly variable and have a high degree of adaptability, resilience, and integration in the contexts in which they take place. They are experiences found in different fields of work, ranging from expanded or informal education, community action, gender issues, youth, culture or participation in a very focused way where rooting in the context and specific practices mean they do not respond to a single model nor can they be transferred universally. Moreover, from a creative perspective, it is hard to present them as products and they go beyond the existence of a target audience. They are, therefore, more often community and creative processes that propose content, forms and relationships that can make sense and can generate dynamics around local cultural facilities or autonomously within them.

The way in which the lockdown associated with the pandemic has impacted on artistic, educational or cultural projects with a community outlook, especially with regard to participatory artistic intervention, is analogous to that of other sectors in which human contact intervenes as an essential element. The physical distance imposed by the lockdown measures implied that all the intervention activities that meant contact and physical proximity had to be suspended for a long period of time. There are many small festivals and cycles of artistic intervention that were organised before the spring of 2020 events but which have not started up again with the resumption of activities. One example could be the experimental “Cranc” cinema cycle that had gathered an audience and guest artists at L’Automàtica de Gràcia in an intimate conversation around avant-garde film projections. In this example, we find that the conditioning factors of a small venue, in which all the small-format shows and cycles that were held there had to be cancelled and, in some cases, have not been resumed. This particular case would be the example of a periodic activity cycle in a small community-based cultural association and printing-press. L’Automàtica, as an entity promoting printed culture, the graphic arts and audio-visual experimentation, has recovered activity in many other ways, but on the way it has lost some of the reference cycles and activities that had been key to promoting it.

2. The recognition of community action professionals

Another way of thinking about the effects of the pandemic on the cultural and socio-community intervention sector is to observe how socio-community action, from a professional perspective, experienced lockdown and the consequent exceptional social-health situation. The associations organising workers in the community action sector were briefly in the public eye in June 2020, with the publication of the #AccioComunitariaARA Manifesto promoted by various associations of professionals in the socio-educational and socio-community sector³. The warning issued by sector professionals, faced with the risk of a rise of xenophobic speech, gender violence and the violation of basic rights stemming from the physical isolation and health control measures of the pandemic was made clear. Also the demand for more public financial resources to fund programmes, actions and specific projects to deal with the consequences of the crisis and the need to mitigate deficits in terms of solidarity, mutual support networks, urban social cohesion or coexistence dynamics.

“(…) In order to alleviate this crisis, it is necessary to strengthen, expand and create actions and projects that facilitate awareness and collective commitment in order to continue to put into practice, now more than ever, solidarity, networks of emotional support and cohesion and coexistence, and thus draw a new framework of fairer and more significant relationships between everything public and common.” (#AccióComunitariaAra Manifesto)

In November 2020, the Community Spaces Network organised an online working session between different professionals involved in neighbourhood centres that identified with the framework of community action. About 20 workers in environments identifiable as neighbourhood centres, Omnia points, but also representatives of neighbourhood community management entities, went online to discuss various issues that needed urgent attention. The regulatory context was one of an exceptional social health situation and the central point on the agenda for the session revolved around the limited action posed by PROCICAT in its daily action. One of the underlying problems of social cohesion governance of social in the city is the lack of clear references in the social and media field about the specific work of community workers. A serious problem with very specific manifestations in the form of precariousness and job vulnerability throughout the community action sector, conditioned by the fact that it is not organically framed within the public social services system.

Community action is located in a grey area (or no man’s land) between public services and resources (represented by social workers, public administration technicians or primary care centres), and the processes of self-organisation, mutual support and citizen resilience of

3. This manifesto had a replica in Spain, promoted by *the Network of Spaces and Agents of Community Culture* (2022), the “Manifesto in defence of the community culture, its people and its spaces”.

neighbourhood movements. Workers in the socio-community sector are now used to having to combine sometimes contradictory actions: professional action carrying out public policy and the direct action of neighbourhood militancy. During the lockdown imposed due to the pandemic this complementarity was constrained.

(...) as if we had the feeling that we were replacing the role of the Administration, facilitating all this support, this help, by circulating the information, this ability to access places, elements that we could not access because the Administration was closing doors, everything that was accessing social workers was difficult, because everything required a prior appointment, through an application that was very complicated ... In that sense, we can say that the Administration has forgotten about the silenced population, and that's serious. (Amanda Canals, worker of the Community Adult Training School - La Troca - XES Summer School, June 2021).

During the months that followed the toughest lockdown, and as local cultural facilities progressively opened their doors, returning to normal more slowly than other sectors, the professional sphere of community action which, in terms of working conditions, is closer to the third sector than to the public administration, experienced the dilemmas of a lack of clear references more sharply. Technical issues, linked to the urgency of the moment, on how it was possible to get round physical distancing restrictions by taking advantage of some administrative silences, emerged in the everyday action of community workers.

"[...] Many activities, we discussed them with the district and they said no... [...] Then you realise that perhaps it's better if we prefer to apologise than ask for permission (...) why is it possible to do federated but not socio-community or cultural activities?" (Discussion group between community workers – November 2020.)

It was also during the state of emergency that this difference emerged between working conditions in the public social services network and work outsourced to the third sector based on community action plans. The lack of coordination between social workers and community workers, and the fact that socially (politically and in the media) there is a profound ignorance of what community action is and the role it plays in strengthening the local social fabric. The identification of this need in the political sphere was highlighted in December 2020 when the Parliament of Catalonia approved a new Strategic Plan for Social Services (2020-2024), with a budget provision that the Catalan Minister of Labour, Social Action and Family described as "more preventive and more social" (ACN, 2020). For the period 2021–2022, this plan allocates €62M to actions that correspond to this more community-based approach to social services.

(...) call to tender for non-profit entities to develop projects in areas such as attention to child and adolescent care, voluntary associations, immigrant support, the fight against sexist violence, equal rights, education in leisure, support for vulnerable families, the homeless or the elderly, among others. (Catalan News Agency, 2020)

It is also important to point out the role of this group of professionals as barometers of the increase in social inequalities and detecting problems relating to equity and access to public services. Based on direct contact with those sectors of the population that have been left behind in the accelerated digitisation process associated with the pandemic, many workers at the OMNIA points programme for access to new technologies, for example, emphasise that during the state of emergency, educational programmes aimed at schools were prioritised by this network of local facilities run by the Generalitat, and other population groups were left aside in a situation of exclusion, thus broadening the digital gap.

3. The reaction of the movement in favour of the community management of culture

The visibility of the movement in favour of the community management of culture can be situated between two moments. Between the years of crystallisation of many social and neighbourhood

struggles exacerbated by the 2008 crisis, expressed in collective unrest around the 15-M movement, and the impact of the socio-economic and ecological crisis, yet to be assumed in many ways, uncovered by the syndemic⁴ as of 2020. We find ourselves in a context that is more or less clearly related to the limits of capitalist economic growth, the climate crisis and the scarcity of energy resources. It is in this framework that, at a very local level, several self-organised neighbourhood projects to promote responses for overcoming inequality and social exclusion have also faced up to the multifaceted nature of contemporary challenges with cultural initiatives rooted in an uneven reality marked by uncertainty and volatility. Thus, we can understand spaces of community management around cultural projects as self-organising dynamics of collective rethinking in the face of a reality marked by a multiplicity of critical fronts. To summarise a common stance we can say that they are all cultural experiences linked to an ecological and feminist vision of economic development. Conceptual references with which we can synthesize the ideological lines of the sociopolitical movement around community management. A space that advocates creating degrowth alliances and which emphasises local autonomy and economic democratisation as central to cultural practices.

In the research sponsored by the ICUB, Hidra and ArtiBarri (2018) mentioned above, they stand out as the second group of activities included as references in the understanding of the community management of culture as “new spaces of community management”. Among these, neighbourhood centres such as the Casal de Barri de la Prosperitat; Casal Font d'en Fargues; Casa Orlandai, in Sarrià; Ateneu Harmonia, in Sant Andreu; Casal Pou de la Figuera, in the Sant Pere i Santa Caterina neighbourhood; Farinera del Clot; Can Batlló and La Lleialtat, in Sants, as well as others, have triggered a movement that has led the local authority to recognise grassroots citizen platforms as sovereign agents that provide a key added value in the leadership of cultural facilities. In that regard, the citizen management agreements for cultural facilities identify, in Barcelona, a way of doing local culture in which local communities are involved in the production and management of content by promoting the democratisation of cultural practices. Outside Barcelona experiences such as those of Coma-Cross, in Salt; Can Sempere, Premià de Mar or Ateneu Candela, in Terrassa, at different points of organisational maturity and with different degrees of institutionalisation, recognition and collaboration with the public sector, have also been mirrored in this type of agreement.

(...) community management must be understood as a political movement, never as a movement of management by delegation. Delegation management is done by companies through concessions or whatever, but the only reason for being in community management is precisely the fact that it reaches where the Administration can't. Here conflict, new frameworks, social transformation, are important, and I believe the problem – and I'm not so much gunning against the Administration, but rather the movement itself – is that there is a risk, and the pandemic has revealed it, that if there is no conflict, if there is no movement and there is no grassroots movement, community management loses its reason for being, and sometimes management, and citizen management in particular, can give a false sense of security. [...] I only understand community management as an emancipatory space for people and [...] for collectives, because, if not, we will become managers, and there will always be other managers that will do it cheaper and with fewer problems.(Oriol Barba – Centre Cívic Casa Orlandai)

4. According to Wikipedia, “a syndemic, or synergistic epidemic, is the aggregation of two or more concurrent or sequential epidemics in a population with biological interactions that exacerbate the prognosis and burden of the disease. Syndemics develop under health disparity, caused by poverty, stress or structural violence, and are studied by epidemiologists and medical anthropologists concerned with public health, community health and the effects of social conditions on health. The syndemic approach departs from the biomedical approach to diseases to diagnostically isolate, study, and treat diseases as distinct entities separate from other diseases and independent of social contexts” (Website consulted on April 13, 2022).

These spaces are defined as "new" because they dialogue with a previous experience of demanding facilities for the neighbourhoods. This previous wave was that of the spaces called for at the start of the 1980s, the result of local demands and aimed at offering diverse cultural facilities. Under different forms of management, La Flor de Mayo, La Sedeta, El Bon Pastor, the Ateneu Popular de 9 Barris, the Cotxeres de Sants, Can Felipa, La Bascula or l'Artesà de Gràcia can be placed chronologically as models of that wave prior to the current or "new" wave of demands for spaces for participatory cultural management. As Castro and Rodrigo (2018) point out, especially from 2011, we find initiatives throughout the city to reclaim spaces, with a collective outlook that is not restricted to the demand for the provision of facilities but rather seeks community involvement through neighbourhood platforms with community autonomy in setting up, managing and directing these spaces. Generally speaking, we are talking about initiatives based on an assembly model that works through commissions, which seeks to generate dynamics of democratic governance at an internal level that involve a high degree of local, militant or activist participation.

4. The need for proximity in relation to culture

The spaces promoting community management of activities and infrastructure for cultural empowerment all emphasise that development is not just something based on hardware, technology, or biomedicine, but that cultural emancipation, democratic governance and lifelong education are also key aspects of local development. However, there is no simple formula for participation in the management of cultural activities, even less one that is easy to replicate. The cities affected by the processes of commercialisation and fragmentation of social relations are extremely unequal in terms of popular involvement in participatory practices in culture. Civic capabilities and community involvement in cultural and grassroots projects can vary enormously from one neighbourhood to another (Barbieri, 2022). If the pandemic has revealed one thing as a cross-cutting phenomenon, despite the unequal living conditions in cities, it is the profound and long-term meaning spaces have that foster a close relationship between population and culture. Also its precariousness in the order of priorities taken for granted in an emergency situation.

[...] Well, of course, culture is not a sector, culture is not an industry, culture is public health, culture is community health, and during the pandemic here we have slipped up, we are sick, as a community, and we have to reverse this situation via the local facilities, and I think here we have a role to play, and calling for culture to be a basic service that must be guaranteed; at this time there are some facilities that are having problems, it is easy to cut this budget, and I understand that we must get the administration to see community culture through these capillary local facilities as essential and as basic. (Enric Capdevila – Barcelona Citizen Management Platform)

It is not always easy to build the associative and organisational balances that make cultural dynamics in favour of economic democratisation and community management of culture possible. These balances are especially complex and difficult to maintain over time. The cycles of social mobilisation and those of citizen participation in culture come and go, marked by dynamics that are difficult to predict, such as expressions of collective discontent or the impact on the territory of overlapping systemic aggressions. In addition, citizen participation in cultural life is also conditioned by biographical processes, such as the moment in their life cycle people find themselves at. Many boards of cultural entities encounter problems with renewing positions and having social groups that are within the age-range for having children or professionally establishing themselves. These entities find they have to organise spokespersons and committees by relying mostly on the hours and activism of people in age groups other than those mentioned above. If the cycles of association participation are already marked by precariousness and instability, when we cross thresholds of exceptionality, the situation is amplified. Events such as those associated with the pandemic directly affect how popular participation in culture or community forms of democratising ties at local level are manifested and reproduced. Firstly, it is worth highlighting how the exceptional nature of the experience of lockdown led to personal and comprehensive rethinking of the reasons for it, and the centrality of activism in people's lives.

(...) yes, lockdown has affected ties. It has affected our ties with everything, our ties with school, with the Ateneu, with work, if you have been able to work remotely... Lockdown has affected the ties. It has also placed life much more centre stage than it was. I think many of us have been able to size up life with not being out at work for eight hours a day. What's happened is that life has taken on such a presence, that sometimes you had to work at home with the two children there, but it has balanced things out, so, above all, it has affected the ties. The social ties. In terms of social ties, the pandemic, obviously, has had an impact. If your physical presence diminishes, which is what makes you commit to someone, which is what makes you participate and be present, there is less commitment and there is less participation. So, we need to go back to generating collective experiences so we can connect with each other. And until we can open again without problems and without restrictions, without prior appointments, it will be difficult to recover this link. At the same time, there are many people who have connected virtually, which is curious, but people that did not have the availability to be present for many hours have connected much more in online meetings. (Mariona Soler - Working Group on the Solidarity Economy and Community Management at the Ateneu Popular de 9 Barris)

The way in which the community management spaces of culture have been overwhelmed by the pandemic can be characterised, in general terms, as very negative due to the centrality that close contact between people has in them. However, it must also be said that in some exceptional aspects it has served to rethink things. As we have seen, community culture practices have been negatively affected with regard to the loss of physical closeness, associated with body distancing measures and disruption of many of their regular activities based precisely on fostering the ties of close contact. In addition to the importance of physical proximity in consolidating neighbourhood alliances and feelings of belonging to spaces and projects, there is also the difficulty that many of the everyday activities have been suspended or postponed indefinitely. It should be noted that not all the spaces for community management of culture cover the same type of needs with regard to the population in their territory, and not all are as essential in guaranteeing the existence of non-commercialised meeting spaces for the population. The halt to face-to-face activity at Casal del Pou de la Figuera, in the Santa Caterina neighbourhood of Ciutat Vella, for example, considering the sociodemographic characteristics of the people that give meaning to it through activities, has had psychosocial effects that are not comparable to halting the activity of a civic centre in another neighbourhood in the city. In this particular framework, those outdoor activities that were able to sidestep physical distancing measures were strengthened, especially the activity around the urban allotments identified as green spaces especially coveted in the most dense urban centres, would be the paradigmatic exception.

(...) at the start of lockdown what happened? Just when we practically couldn't get out of the house or could just get out of the house to do certain things, little by little in a more regulated or more "alegal" way, the allotments were turning into something we couldn't have at the neighbourhood centre. That's to say, this meeting point, this point of support for these people who needed this link they couldn't find in person with practically nobody, was covered by the allotments, and increased participation drastically. You can check that using the WhatsApp group that they have but also in the day-to-day routine. More people were going there. People who said that they had been living in the neighbourhood for some time, and realised it was the green space they could access while living in the centre of Barcelona. So, it was this haven that allowed us, during the pandemic, to safeguard these points of contact and relationships that we feel in the centre but, in fact, throughout 2020 and when the measures were relaxed a little, we still couldn't have the centre, because it was all so restricted. We don't work with inscriptions, this free movement, what I was what I was telling you about, so there was no such interaction between activities, those unlikely meetings I mentioned before. We're getting that back just now. At the end of last year and the beginning of this one...The things that happened before are starting to happen again. So, the allotments have been a bit of a salvation during all this time. They've grown with many things, sustained participation. Participation has increased and, from that point of

view, of being able to meet one another, of being able to look after one another, it has been a treasure. (Aidà Almira – Casal del Barri del Pou de la Figuera)

Another positive effect that has been observed in the discussion groups we have taken part in has stemmed from the forced-march digitalisation of project management and coordination mechanisms and activities. In many civic or cultural associations, the paradox has been that online work commissions have led to the identification of obsolete routines such as the “presentialism” and “assembly-centrism” of many of these entities.

5. Networking to define community metrics

Literature on social innovation has promoted use of the expression “bottom-linked governance” to overcome the dichotomies of top-down urban social policies, or the simplistic approach of only evaluating social transformation initiatives as valid if they arise out of a genuine push from the ground. We could use the expression “bottom-linked” or democratising governance to identify many of the public, community and cooperative partnerships that have developed in the city of Barcelona during the last decade, where the central player has been the Citizen Management Platform (name in Catalan *Plataforma de Gestió Ciutadana*). The Citizen Management Platform was created in 2009 by local organisations involved in negotiations with the City Council to be recognised as awardees in the transfer of spaces with a status that recognised their crucial role as organisations that articulate urban social cohesion, rather than simply being regarded as providers of cultural animation services.

[...] We understand citizen management because civic management, the name used by the City Council, is a formula we left behind some time ago given its connotations with the civic order regulations. And the subject of citizen management is the management of a public service or facility by the citizens. (...) The City Council has a need to label these facilities. We would like these labels to be much more flexible; there are civic centres, creation factories, neighbourhood centres, youth centres, but there are also specific services, information points, schools for the elderly, and there are sectoral facilities such as youth, Torre Jussana, and so on; then again, it’s true that civic or citizen management has been going on in Catalonia and Barcelona for many years, but regulated in some way by a normative framework. In Barcelona we’ve been lucky enough to have an umbrella, which we’ve had since 1992, which is the Citizen Charter and which has gradually developed. And since 2009 there has been the Citizen Management Platform, through which we entered into negotiations with the City Council that, over three or four years, achieved some progress in getting a regulatory framework which means that, at present, there are more than 90 city management services or facilities running some 60 neighbourhood entities. This is a precarious framework. On the one hand it is based on an element that is conceptualisation. We have a political document, then, a framework of terms and conditions and agreements for citizen management, enabling it to be developed. But, on the other hand, we need an administration that is sympathetic, and which every time we ask for it to vary slightly, instead of acting as our guardian or watchdog, accompanies us in this process. And we have to say that over the years we’ve dealt with different types of governments and citizen management is accepted by different [political] colours. Here, in the city, it is guaranteed; elsewhere in Spain, it is not the case, and this is a trend that can change, which always requires a demand, vigilance, and an assertion on the part the citizens of what they need. (Enric Capdevila – Citizen Management Platform)

With regard to the effects of the pandemic on these spaces, it should be noted that the exceptional situation has highlighted the importance of articulating self-organised, dynamic territories capable of adapting to changing scenarios. In this context, the role of community management spaces in the construction of these collaborative governance environments is strengthened. It can be said that the pandemic, despite in many ways boosting local participation within these institutions of the commons, has revealed the importance of articulating these second- and third-level entities as the associations that more often than not they represent.

[...] The challenge we have is to start working, not within the framework of the agreement or the limits set by the Administration, but on what the territory needs and wants. And to put at the service of the territory the resources and the personal infrastructures that we have at our disposal in the territory. And each territory has different dynamics and needs. [...] In this neighbourhood, for example, we have never had a community plan, because we do not deserve it. And then, well, as a result of Covid, we have set up a social roundtable that has served to bring together day centres, Students' Families Associations (AFAs), other dynamics, through which we must ensure this melting pot can be cohesive, be condensed. Each district, each neighbourhood has its dynamics, but it's true that we must succeed in strengthening the community, be more interdependent; we need to create structures regardless of the pace of the Administration, which has shown itself to be always on the wrong foot. (Enric Capdevila – Citizen Management Platform)

In that respect, the sector has long been exploring the socio-political articulation of the Network of Community Spaces, which has a Catalan vocation and brings together more entities than those strictly recognised as "civic managers" by Barcelona City Council. The role that the Network has played, even before the pandemic, in defining a useful tool for measuring the socio-community impact of cultural projects is worthy of study and attention.

The Community Balance Sheet⁵, developed by a working group from 2017 and 2020 as a battery of indicators following the model of the Solidarity Economy Network Social Balance Sheet, has been used a lot in sector networking following the resumption of face-to-face activities after the pandemic and could play a very practical role in consolidating public-community partnerships. In order to understand the usefulness of this measuring tool, it is also necessary to understand the history of governance between the Barcelona local authority and the aforementioned Barcelona Citizen Management Platform, a second level body that groups local platforms with a vocation for organisational autonomy and involved in community management of resources, public services and infrastructure.

(...) and then we set up the Network of Community Spaces, and there the heart of everything was: we need to define what the community management project is, based on what we already do. Because now the City Council is beginning to say it wants this-and-that, community management this-and-that, and going on about co-management this and collaborative management that..., and the essence of what we understand as the basis of autonomous management, and basing ourselves on the practices we defined for the community balance, is being lost. The community balance sheet is the final phase of indicators that enables you to self-evaluate if your practices have a community quality, okay? But before doing the balance sheet we compiled community practices from our projects. And this was very useful for us so we could conceptualise what we understood by community management. And then, through the Citizen Management Platform, we conceptualised the civic management agreement, which was the regulatory part that covered us, while, on the other hand, through the Network of Community Spaces, we related the discourse of community management practices. (MS)

It is in this regard that we can say, as Font, Ojeda and Urbano (2015) point out, that community management experiences in the culture environment offer a field for experimenting with spaces that goes beyond the institutions/market tandem. The Network of Community Spaces communication commission (2022) emphasises that in order to understand community management projects economically, it is necessary to step back from a view linked to private profit. Economic exchange is not the vehicle of many of the actions that take place in this type of space. However, that does not mean they are spaces free from the precarious dynamics typical of social capitalism and so ingrained within cultural industries. The way those environments relate to those

5. The campaign to apply the Community Balance Sheet 2022 by the XES can be accessed at: <https://xes.cat/2022/05/17/arrenca-la-campanya-de-balanc-comunitari/>

dynamics – the "how" they take them into account to counteract them – the mechanisms they choose to establish selection criteria for suppliers or to promote certain working conditions, for example, is precisely what defines them.

On the other hand, the militant, activist or voluntary work that allows cultural community management spaces to function is very often invisible and, therefore, requires an effort to bring it out. With the intention of giving it meaning and highlighting its contribution, various initiatives that depend directly on it have attached a lot of importance to promoting tools such as the community balance sheet. The community balance sheet tool developed by the Community Spaces Network (XEC) has, in turn, been tested with the Barcelona Citizen Heritage Programme, coordinated by the La Hidra cooperative. Around initiatives such as the Can Batlló case, Laia Forné and Mauro Castro (2022) have explored impact metrics, which enable the contribution of community management agreements to be assessed and compared to public-private partnerships (PPPs). In that sense, they point to the importance of developing metrics that emphasise social and community impact as a key institutionalisation strategy for defending the commons, especially in the urban cultural field.

For the recovery and conservation of the commons, apart from merely having regulations capable of sustaining the regulation of private non-appropriation of the commons, which is a sensitive point, it is also necessary to support those regulations with mechanisms for measuring the positive and differential impacts of the governance agreements represented by the partnerships. This is what is at stake in the institutionalisation of metrics that highlight aspects such as the public use value of these organisational environments, and which separate management agency evaluation from the simple minimisation of costs.

6. Toward the construction of local ecosystems for economic democratisation

The link between community management and economic democratisation is not only summed up by the fact that many cultural community management spaces give rise to, and are based on, the articulation of community economies that avoid forms of capitalist stimulus based on private profit and seek to defend the common good. The movement around the solidarity economy and its link to these community frameworks of emancipatory culture is linked to the reflection on the complementarity between initiatives and the intersectionality between social struggles. As Ivan Miró emphasises, community-managed cultural projects are initiatives that connect and reactivate other models of developing the city, articulate forms of cooperative democracy, and also reinvent new community mutualities (Miró, 2018). The diversity of organisational uses and forms to which these types of initiatives can be put is one of their characteristic traits. They are spaces or projects of experiences that favour adaptation to a certain modularity of applications and that are accustomed to continuous transformation, a holistic outlook and associative co-construction. They bring together agents of change with multiple areas of activity, whose joint work results in the cultivation of popular empowerment, critical autonomy and community resilience. Work in common that can take different forms and organisational patterns.

And, if there is one common, cross-cutting public policy demand that has been shared by the different cultural sectors, and others besides, it is the demand for a universal and unconditional basic income. This pre-distributive public policy measure, which could cut across all areas of cultural activity, but which, as we were saying, goes far beyond them, emerged in the form of an outcry from the cultural sector at the hardest time of lockdown. An example of this is the manifesto published in April 2020 and signed by more than 100 organisations and people working in culture on the Nativa website. From the perspective of cultural workers – in a much broader sense than that purely linked to participatory art or community action – a measure such as a universal basic income addresses underlying problems in the cultural and artistic sector and is perceived as a real policy for promoting culture.

Among those problems, it is worth mentioning the ambiguous and often very difficult position of differentiating between the position of a volunteer or political activist, on the one hand, and that of

an entrepreneur or social entrepreneur in the artistic or cultural field, on the other. Many groups and people linked to community management of culture see it as a problem that their own personal economic sustainability revolves around commercial trade associated with cultural activity. The fact that many people working in these cultural community management environments often find themselves wearing different hats and mixing militancy with professional activity is, without a shadow of a doubt, one of the sources of headaches and misunderstandings that a measure such as Basic Universal Income (BUI) could help to tackle.

We need initiatives that imagine, express and promote horizons which go beyond the existing unjust and unsustainable system, as already expressed – and will be expressed again – by so many groups and places round the planet before the Covid-19 crisis and which, nevertheless, during lockdown exit, some seem to look as if it could be restored. Manifesto 2020 - People who work in culture, for a universal and unconditional basic income. [Nativa.cat](#)

At a time when emergencies are increasing at a faster rate, it is urgent to assess how community culture, spaces, projects and the people who facilitate them react to conditions of rights violations, increasing social inequalities and multiple crises typical of disaster capitalism. Our aim in this article has been to emphasise the need to accompany and stimulate community cultural processes so that, among many other things, urban resilience and economic democratisation initiatives can grow and enrich each other and serve as a lever for meeting the systemic challenges we face.

We believe that this increasingly involves the construction of mutual support networks and educational environments, as well as social self-organisation in the face of the problems, failures and emergencies that we are facing with increasing urgency. In addition, as we have tried to show, the pandemic has had a devastating impact on many of the collective learning programmes provided in environments linked to participatory art and community action.

We believe the presence in neighbourhoods and public spaces of creative community processes that decisively sustain and reproduce life, apart from facilities and economic resources, calls for a conceptual strengthening and firm commitment at the sociopolitical level in favour of community action as a form of preventive social policy that is absolutely necessary. For now, here, the approach to community action is purely palliative in contexts of conflict. It is in that regard that this proposes promoting basic autonomy and collective creativity as basic elements in the service of coexistence, social transformation and economic democracy. A commitment that must include stable and ongoing recognition in the form of improved working conditions for professionals in the community action and mediation sector who are in a situation of permanent exceptionality, affected by the precarious processes of outsourcing public policies and conditions of existence that do not correspond to their essential role in maintaining urban social cohesion and fostering the eco-social transition.

How public authorities recognise community management spaces and experiences, through local projects, maintenance and consolidation agreements or introducing the community dimension into participatory management agreements are key issues that various players in the sector have been critically discussing for some time. In addition to guaranteeing and expanding the provision of economic resources for these spaces, we believe that value should be placed on the networking of existing players in the territory in which these experiences are developed, favouring the conceptualisation of a plural and transformative economy that questions the public/private dichotomy, with the introduction of community and cooperative dimensions in the consideration of socially transformative agents. The measurement instruments that the sector has developed to lend visibility to its importance, such as the community balance sheet or the political measures that go to the root of the problem, for example, the Universal Basic Income, are tools that must be considered for facing the immediate future.

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