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Crops in the city: agricultural activity as a form of resilience in the metropolitan context

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Abstract:

This paper aims to analyse the emergence of agricultural activity in European metropolitan regions as a form of citizens' resilience in front of the crisis. In fact, agricultural activity is coming back to desindustrialized cities in various forms and under different logics. The wide label 'urban gardening' refers to a plethora of different phenomena including the recovery of empty spaces in city centres used to promote new common public spaces and to (re)learn about food production, self-consumption oriented practices, or even the creation of coepratives in the urban context to generate employment in the agricultural sector. This paper has two aims. The first one is to provide a conceptual clarification of 'urban gardening' giving a vision of the different forms of agricultural activity in the urban context. In this sense the paper analyses different conceptions and logics behind urban gardening practices through a literature review. In second place the research wants to analyse two specific practices of urban gardening emerged in the context of the financial crisis in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area: one in the city centre and another in the peripheral area. This analysis aims to understand to what extent practices on 'urban gardening' are forms of individual and collective citizens' resilience. To do so, it will take attention, with an ethnographic perspective, to a) the historical background of agricultural practices in the city and its links with the emerging activities b) who are the promoters of these practices, what is their socio-economic situation and their objectives in terms of food production and transformation of the city; c) what discourses and knowledge on the relation between the urban and the food production lies behind these practices and d) what is the logic of collective organisation and the degree of political implication of the involved actors in the specific case studies

Feeding the city: different relations between agriculture and cities

The label urban gardening refers to a plethora of different phenomena related to the agricultural activity within the city. In a general sense, the concept embraces practices promoted by public, private or civil society actors aimed at growing all kind of plants in an urban context. Defined in this sense, urban gardening includes community gardens managed by a collectivity, private gardens in homes, roofs balconies etc., or public parks in which public administration promotes gardening. Behind these practices we can find also different logics and objectives, including the promotion of new forms of public spaces, creating local forms of food production and consumption, or generating economic benefit and employment. To understand the current development of these practices in cities and the emergence of movements for local production or greening the city, we must understand first the long historical network of cities with agriculture and how this link has been modified with industrialisation. As industrialisation processes took different forms and paces in different countries and regions, the link between cities and the agricultural activity is also different.

Despite the strong industrialisation process of european countries in the XIX and XX centuries, only a few cities abandoned completely all kind of agricultural activity during this period, with most of the cities having agriculture remaining as an activity in the city periphery¹. The demise of the agricultural and farming activities within cities was possible only when technological innovations allowed more productivity of land in the countryside and faster transport systems were displayed to feed the city, that is when a food processing and transportation industry emerged (Steel, 2008). This change allowed new and more products arriving to the city, which was growing due to the concentration of economic activity and the arrival of workforce from the countryside². Thus, use-value of land in the city lost their relevance in favour of its exchange-value (Smith, 2010, pp. 77–78), giving place to the logic of capitalist urban growth, maximising land profit for industrial or housing purposes. This allowed, too, the model of low-density cities as transportation and food supplying systems made easier enlarging distances from the city centre.

Nevertheless, this process of autonomy from the immediate environment for the provision of resources took place unevenly depending on the pace of industrial development in each city. In many cities agricultural activity remained in many forms until the seventies, when a new wave of environmentalism brought demands for green spaces and local production. Before the emergence of environmentalism demands, agricultural activity was often an informal strategy of urban working classes to diversify their income³, using available land in the periphery and outskirts of the city, but also some community spaces. These practices were retaken and resigified with the boom of environmentalism and the push for local autonomy, with different practices linked to urban gardening, including the use of private space for self-consumption oriented production, the emergence of community gardens or the allocation of public space for urban gardening by city councils. In this regard, the experiences in New York are salient, but we can find also a long history on urban gardening in northern European countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium or Germany.

1 The idea of city-gardens proposed by Howard and other urbanists was an attempt to bring back cities to nature, ensuring its link with agriculture. Nevertheless, these projects as Jacobs (1961) analysed were doomed to fail both in terms of the development of the city and its connection to the nature.

2 As Steel (2008) suggests, cities have always used commerce to transport food for their dwellers, but this was always combined with local production, specially in farming

3 In the midlands cities of Walsall, Dudley or Wednesbury in the epicentre of the first industrial revolution in England agricultural activity was an strategy until the 1960s. Until then, workers maintained their small workshops and they had also small crops and animals (Rowlands, 2003).

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In many cities of southern Europe industrialisation took place later and was weaker than in northern Europe, which meant that agriculture remained relevant as a formal or informal economic activity in the city until the last quarter of the twentieth century. As we shall see, in the case of Barcelona agricultural activity remained until the sixties, when state-led industrialisation of the city attracted large numbers of population from the Spanish countryside and land was used to allocate them as well as to allocate factories and industries. As in many other metropolitan areas, in Barcelona metropolitan region we can find places in which industrialisation never arrived and where agricultural activity is developed supplying products mainly for the local market. On the other hand, in Barcelona, as well as in many other cities, precarious life conditions of the working class and their countryside origin brought to the emergence of informal practices of urban gardening, specially in the periphery of cities. This practices have remained and today we can find informal use of land in the periphery of the city, for instance in the margins near railways and roads (Aragay Esmerats, 2010). Moreover, by that time, environmentalism was not an expanded value

Rather than analysing the whole group of urban gardening activities from an economic or sustainability perspective, this paper focuses on the role of community gardens in times of crisis, trying to understand the role of these practices in terms not only of food production but also in the city development and configuration. To do so, I will analyse the emergence of community gardens in Barcelona, where the practice is quite innovative and must be framed in the context of the financial crisis of the country. The guiding hypothesis of the research is that the emergence of community gardens in Barcelona must be understood as one of the many strategies that generate citizenship resilience against the perverse effects of the crisis.

A frame to understand urban gardening as a form of resilience: Citizens organisation and 'Citizenship resilience'

With the emergence of the financial crisis there has been increasing interest on 'resilience' of the system, that is the capacity of adaptation of cities or societies to the rapid changes provoked by the crisis. Although there are different approaches and definitions, the concept of resilience refers to the capacity of systems (people, nature, institutions, networks, etc.) to face major shifts that have a deep impact in individuals and collective life, adapting to the new situation but maintaining their own key elements such as identity, functions, or structure (Balsas, 2012; D. J. Davidson, 2010; Mohaupt, 2009). The concept refers literally to 'the act of rebounding or springing back, rebound or recoil (Oxford English Dictionary) and has been used in different scientific disciplines to understand the capacity of systems or objects to tackle drastic change in conditions: physics, mathematics, environmental research and psychologists have widely used the term to explain phenomena of adaptation and change.

The concept has travelled from these disciplines to social sciences (Mohaupt, 2009), where has been used mainly in two different ways that have tended to converge in a perspective of resilience as a social process. The first form of using the term is applying it to social systems, trying to understand how certain social systems or certain aspects of social systems can resist big changes without disappearing or changing their nature. From this point of view we can find analysis of urban resilience that try to understand how cities and metropolitan regions are adapting themselves to major changes through new economic proposals, urban infrastructures and/or social policies. This approach understands resilience from an ecological perspective. In ecology and environment studies, resilience has been promoted as an alternative concept to 'sustainability' in the explanation of stability and transformation of ecosystems (Davidson, 2008). In front of the more static conception of sustainable ecosystems, resilience allows to understand better how ecosystems are continuously adapting themselves to preserve their structure and ensuring continuity through time.

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'resilience' summarizes the capacity of a system to absorb changes and shocks without changing its main patterns and structure. A system with no resilience transform into another different system or collapses. This notion has been transferred to social sciences to understand how certain social systems are resilient to major shifts in different fields, including the analysis of revolutions, or the analysis of cities in front of natural disasters, terrorist attacks, economic crisis or large urban renewal processes (Balsas, 2012).

The second stream of literature in social science has focused on resilience as an asset of individuals and groups to face social exclusion and difficulties, and has emerged largely from physiological research on childhood and education. From this perspective, resilience is understood as the ability of individuals and communities to tackle a situation of risk or adversity. Although the psychological approach, social scientists have increasingly included elements like social capital, peer-relations and contextual and neighbourhood elements in the concept of resilience, rather than considering it an individual asset. Thus, these authors focus on the interactions between the individual and its environment, and the active role that individuals play in the construction of their own processes of resilience.

One major problem when facing the concept of resilience is who or what is the actor that is 'resilient': Depending on the approach, resilience might refer to the individual, or a system at different scales (neighbourhood, city, country, welfare system, etc.). Here we want to focus on the idea of 'citizenship resilience' that is, the capacity of adaptation of citizens to a changing situation without losing their social, political and civil rights. In that sense, 'citizenship resilience' includes a wide array of practices that citizens promote individually or collectively to overcome situations of exclusion and inequalities and the weakening of citizenship rights⁴. These practices can have with a clear political orientation, for instance political action of protest, , but they can also take place in daily practices without a reivindication or transformative purpose that allow the strength of rights through its use. When redistributive practices are weakened, citizens can reinforce reciprocity mechanisms to ensure they have resources, mainly at family or neighbourhood level. This promotion can take place without a clear political orientation towards emancipation⁵. Analysing citizenship resilience allows us to avoid analysing urban resilience in general terms, which means mixing economic (that is, market economy) resilience with the resilience on social conditions and local welfare. The emergence of practices that citizens are developing to face the effects of the crisis and the cuts take place through processes of social innovation which bring new responses and forms of organisation in front of new forms of social exclusion.

Taking into consideration this definition, these article wants to analyse to what extent the emergence of urban gardening can be considered as a form of citizenship resilience, taking into consideration the case of Barcelona. The article is based on in research on the emergence of community gardens in Barcelona and on interviews and participant observation in two community gardens in Barcelona.

Community gardens in Barcelona: a form of response to the crisis?

Although pioneer in the industrial development of Spain, Barcelona suffered a late urban expansion

4 Following the classical definition of Marshall (1950), citizenship rights are formed by civil, political and social rights. It is in this sense that citizenship resilience refers here to the adaptation of citizens to continue using their rights.

5 In fact, its development with no political orientation is behind the proposals of neoliberal governments proposing the retirement of the state and the development of societal links. The big society program in the UK is a salient example of this trend.

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due to its specific situation as a citadel⁶. The expansion of the city started in 1864 with the Cerdà Plan, which foresaw the 'ruralisation' of the city and the integration of the city into nature. Nevertheless, urban agents and land owners developed the plan to maximise profit of land changing substantively the original plan and eliminating the prevision of green spaces. The huge industrial growth after the Spanish civil war and under the Franco Dictatorship brought a huge increase of population in the periphery of the city formed by a working class coming from the countryside, mainly from Andalucía, Extremadura and Galicia, but also from other parts of Spain. The allocation of this population eliminated a relevant part of the existing rural areas near the city, transformed into residential neighbourhoods. At the same time, part of these neighbours started to develop informal strategies to improve their situation, amongst them the agricultural activity and the self-organisation in neighbourhoods. Thus, the periurban area of Barcelona has been continuously used as an area for the development of urban agriculture. Nevertheless, the tradition of urban gardens within the city is something relatively new. After the return of democracy, this trend still persisted but the democratic context made possible for the neighbours to articulate demands in this sense to the city council. Informal practices were formalised and in 1997 the city council promoted the network of urban gardens of Barcelona, for retired people, consisting on public spaces for individual use hired on a temporal basis. Nowadays there exist 12 public urban gardens in the city with different extension.

In spite of this policy, during the first decade of the XXI century there have been different attempts to promote community gardens, often linked to squatted houses and self-managed social centres⁷. But it is not until the upsurge of the economic crisis in Spain in 2008 that we can witness the growth of informal community gardens in Barcelona, using abandoned land after the fall of the real estate sector. As graphic 1 shows, the growth of urban gardens is specially relevant after the organisation of the 15M movement, which decentralised at neighbourhood level has promoted urban gardens in certain parts of the city. It must be stressed that the evolution shows the creation of new urban gardens but also the eviction of urban gardens already existing. For instance, between 2010 and 2013 11 new urban gardens emerged and 4 disappeared.

This data reveals two trends: in first place the emergence of community gardening as a practice linked to social movements and neighbourhood development on one side, and its growth since 2011 as an innovative practice to retake the city in the framework of the 15M movement. In fact, between 2010 and 2013 the number of community gardens almost doubled (from 11 to 21) and most of these experiences were not linked to a squatted social centre or other activities of the social movements but as new autonomous practices from the indignados movement (occupy movement in Spain).

Literature on the effects of the 15M movement on the urban arena is not abundant, yet, but some insights can be detected in terms of participation, and promotion of new initiatives. The movement that was born spontaneously from a protest for a Real Demoacty on May 15th 2011, decided to decentralise its general assembly in Plaça Catalunya into neighbourhood assemblies which were called to bring the initiative of the movement. The assembly in Plaça Catalunya had organised commissions in different issues, one of them the urban gardening commission, which allowed to expand the idea of urban gardening and to some extent brought the issue into the 15M agenda⁸. This

6 After the 1705-1714 war, the city was considered a citadel and it was banned to build outside the walls of the city (Grau, 2004).

7 Two salient cases in this regard are Can Masdeu, in Nou Barris district in the mountains of Collserola, and the case of the urban garden in Ciutat Vella "l'hort del forat" consolidated after strong reivindications of neighbours for its preservation

8 Further analysis is needed to determine to what extent the creation of the commission was a consequence of a general aim of citizens to talk about gardening or the consequence of a small group promoting the idea.

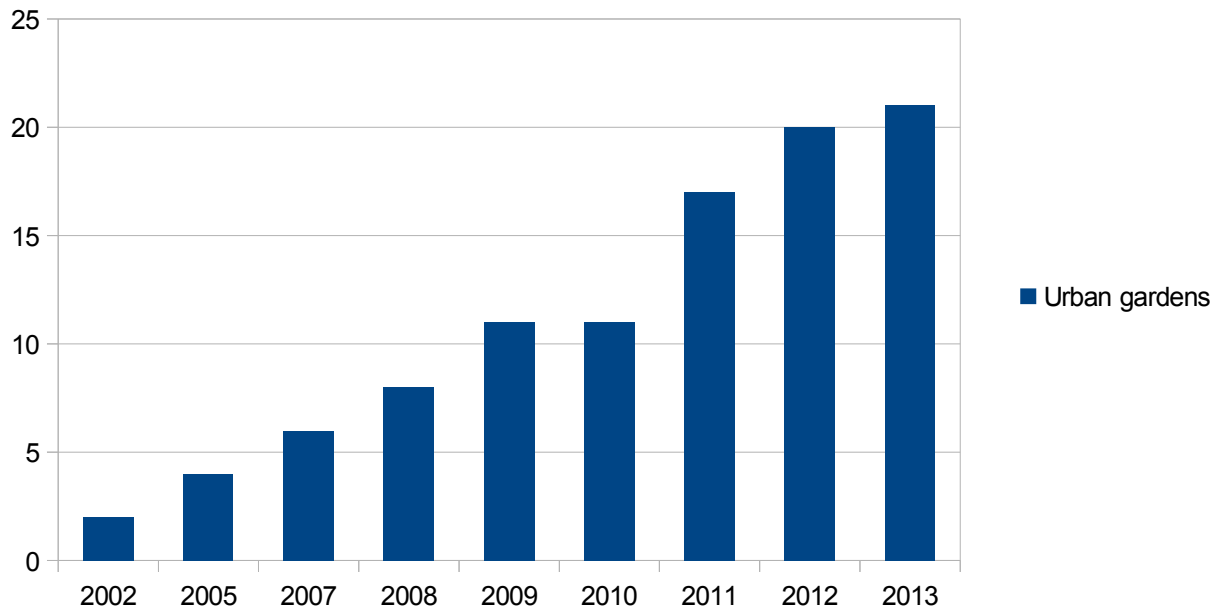
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commission started to crop some vegetables in the square, but the short period of occupation did not allow a consolidation.

The decentralisation of the movement brought new forms of social activism at neighbourhood level and the implication of many citizens which were not previously involved in any kind of social movement or political activism in promotion of “change” at neighbourhood scale, developing some actions at Barcelona scale through an inter-neighbourhood coordinator. That brought a new form of citizens organisation at neighbourhood level that overlaps with the classical neighbourhood associations, which were the main element for political contestation during francoism and the first years of democracy, but that have become strongly institutionalised. Nevertheless this never meant the substitution of the classical institutions. Whereas neighbourhood associations continue to play a role in negotiation and translating citizens demands to the city council, the 15M assemblies are oriented mainly to self-organisation and a clear political aim of changing the status quo without negotiations with power. As we will see in the case of urban gardening, this means greater instability of their initiatives.

Looking at the spatial distribution of gardening practices, we can see that two factors influence the location of the urban gardens. In first place the availability of usable land for cultivating. With the economic crisis both the private real estate sector and public administration have been forced to stop urban development. Many real estate projects in several neighbourhoods have been paralyzed after the demolition of old buildings, creating empty spaces in the neighbourhood. With the crash of real estate companies and its absorption by savings banks that at the same time went into bankruptcy, there is no expectation of future edification. Moreover, the land has lost its value as there exist housing stock already built in the market. This has generated opportunities for citizens, who consider these empty plots in the neighbourhood as a problem in social and health terms. As we will see in depth, the proposal for community gardens is seen as a way to generate neighbourhood activity in these places. Thus, from a materialist point of view, the availability of empty plots is key to understand the emergence and growth of urban gardening in Barcelona, despite the land is formally under private hands willing to use it to obtain the major possible profit. On the other hand, the cuts and the lack of funds of public administration has stopped public-led projects of urbanisation involving parks and other equipments. In some cases that has generated citizens initiatives organised at neighbourhood level to promote social centres, urban gardens and other equipments to supply the services that public administration is not offering.

Graphic 1: Evolution of community gardens in Barcelona (2002-2013)



Source: own calculations

The second element influencing the location of community gardens is the social structure of neighbourhoods. In fact, urban gardening practices appear in neighbourhoods of the traditional working class districts. Taking into consideration family income, social inequalities between neighbourhoods have grown in Barcelona with the crisis, and community gardens have emerged in lowering income neighbourhoods. Thus, all the experiences of community gardens are placed in neighbourhoods with available family income below the average of the city. The classic working class neighbourhoods of Poble Nou, Nou Barris or Poble Sec are examples of this situation. Nevertheless, they are not the most impoverished neighbourhoods of the city. Lowering income is not the only explanatory factor for community gardens: they tend to appear where there is strong social life and civil society organisation, which explains that they are located in certain neighbourhoods with long tradition of social organisation of the working class. As we will see in depth for the case of Poble Nou, neighbours have tended to use empty land that has a central position within the neighbourhood rather than occupying land that is far from the social life axes.

Thus, availability of land, worsening of social conditions and existence of strong social life are conditions for the creation of community gardens within the city. Nevertheless, actors promoting this kind of practices have different objectives and orientations, giving relevance to different aspects. From the small survey developed to community gardens promoters, we can see that they can be oriented mainly towards social objectives, that is, creation of public space new places for socialisation and debate, learning etc., or put emphasis on production, that is, putting efforts on productivity and strategies for efficient growth, which in some cases means less consensus-based decisions and more technical approaches to gardening⁹. Although all gardens have these two

⁹ It must be stressed that in all cases this productive approach was based on organic production, without using

dimensions, some of them give priority to one or another. For instance Can Masdeu is an squatted farm in the northern part of the city which is isolated from its neighbourhood, Nou Barris, in the Collserola mountains. Although the project has a social dimension collaborating with different neighbourhood institutions, it has a strong emphasis on ecological production, being the most important agricultural centre of the city and doing tasks of learning for other city gardening experiences. By contrast other initiatives such as a community garden in the inner city, the so-called 'Hort del Xino' has a clear social dimension, as the land and the availability of sunlight is scarce. This two examples are from urban gardens created before the economic crisis, but taking a closer look to the community gardens since 2008 we can see a clear orientation for the social dimension rather than production¹⁰. All that shows that there is a relation between the creation of community gardens and the development of socially innovative forms of citizenship resilience related to the redefinition of space, new sources of local production and creation of new spaces to meet and to share experiences. To clarify to what extent these community gardens are providing new forms of resilience this article focuses on the views of different promoters of community gardens and an in-depth analysis of the community gardens in the neighbourhood of Poblenou, in Barcelona.

The emergence of community gardens in Poblenou

Since its inception during the nineteenth century, Poblenou has been the main industrial neighbourhood of Barcelona. The neighbourhood included factories and housing for the working class, and was the epicentre of the anarchist movement in Barcelona. With the progressive delocation of industries from the city to the rest of the metropolitan area, Poblenou lost part of its economic relevance and decayed with reduced industrial activity and abandoned factories. The neighbourhood suffered deprivation and continued its physical degradation during the eighties, but the celebration of the Olympic games and the upgrading of Barcelona into a global destination for business and tourism changed completely its physical development. In first place, the south western part of the neighbourhood was completely re-urbanised to create the Olympic Village, together with the improvement of the beaches and the creation of new equipments. After the Olympic games, the whole neighbourhood was affected by the plan 22@, the city council project to transform the old industrial neighbourhood of Poblenou into a knowledge-intensive district through an urban plan that allowed certain economic activities into the area. As many authors have analysed (Casellas & Pallares-Barbera, 2009; Martí & Bonet, 2008; Martí-Costa & Pradel, 2012; Pareja-Eastaway, Turmo, Pradel, García-Ferrando, & Simó, 2007) the project was based on a top-down transformation of the neighbourhood which meant a radical transformation changing the use of land for industrial purposes into housing, the creation of new equipments and the start of a process of gentrification of the whole neighbourhood. This urban change started at the end of the nineties, that is, at the beginning of the speculative bubble of the real estate sector in Spain. Poblenou was heavily affected by these dynamics and civil society in the neighbourhood showed strong opposition to the whole 22@ project and contributed to change and mitigate some of its more aggressive aspects. As in many other parts of Spain, the burst of the speculative bubble meant a immediate stop of the real estate sector in the neighbourhood and the fall of many real estate companies, which were absorbed by savings banks. That brought also empty buildings, sometimes unfinished and empty lots of land, as demolishing old buildings is a usual practice to avoid squatting. The situation of crisis of public administration led to the stop or the dramatic slowdown of public-led projects in the neighbourhood, including schools, sports equipments, museums or the

chemicals or any other product for gardening.

10 Although it escapes from the scopes of this article, this relation is inverse in the case of experiences of urban gardening in the rest of metropolitan region, where there is more available land and more distance to large city centres.

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development of a marine zoo amongst others. In this context, neighbourhood associations reclaimed the removal of dangerous abandoned equipment such as mobile cranes, and made a census of abandoned building projects.

In 2011, after 28 years in power, the socialist party lost the local elections in Barcelona and a new conservatist coalition started to rule the city. This meant a change in priorities in urbanism and a new focus on privatisation, giving a main role to private sector in the provision of until then public services. In contrast to other cities in Spain, Barcelona had lower levels of debt and unemployment, mainly due to the strong impact of tourism –a sector not havily impacted by the crisis– in the local economy. Despite the 22@ project and the aims to foster the knowledge economy, Poblenou has been mainly affected by the rise of tourism as an economic activity. Its location near the beach and its closeness to city centre has attracted investors to develop small and large hotels and hostels, giving new economic activity to the neighbourhood but affecting to local shops and businesses.

Is in this context that the 15M assembly decided to occupy empty land to develop a community garden. The 'hort indignat' del Poblenou was created on 11th november 2011 occupying an empty lot that was formerly a soap factory. The lot was elected for being hardly visible for those not living in the neighbourhood: it is on a non-frequented small street in the core of Poblenou and a wall avoids visitors viewing the activity inside the lot. The urban garden commission wanted to create a space for neighourhs through a community garden but at the same time were afraid of being evicted from the occupied land, and decided to develop a policy combining discretion and public activity. The lot is now property of CatalunyaBank, one of the savings banks which was nationalised after its strong debt. The fact that the lot was previously a soap factory brought problems for cultivating as the soil had chemical residues, and it had very bad quality. The transformation of soil into something usable was the first strong effort of the commission.

Following the 15M spirit, the community garden works around a garden assembly which meets once a week to discuss rules and questions around the garden. The assembly is open to everybody who wants to participate, but there is a close link between participants and users of the garden. In fact, the garden is organised in small individual or collective parcels, and a larger community parcel in which all the users participate. For the users, this double structure grants their autonomy and the development of communal activity. Nevertheless, there are common rules for cropping the individual parcels such as not using chemical products or how to obtain and use water. There are also common resources such as tools, etc. The community garden is not only oriented at promoting space for planting. Following the assembly definition the “hort indignat” is “a free, self-organised, and community space were decisions are taken in an assembly, a space with open access, a meeting point for the neighbours, an urban garden, but also a space for creation”. In this regard, the garden has been used until now to promote cultural activities not necessarily related to gardening, being a branch of activities linked to the 15M assembly. The garden has included cinema sessions, poetry festivals, lunches, celebrations and parties for the neighbourhood, apart from other activities more linked to gardening such as workshops of organic food, collaboration with schools and other activities.

With the development of the project, the community garden obtained certain autonomy from the local 15M assembly with only part of their members participating actively in the local assembly and the urban garden assembly at the same time. Thus, we can find a group of people storngly linked to the 15M assembly and other users that see the garden as a space for amusement but less as a political space. We will analyse in depth this question later.

After approximately six months of development, there was an increasing interest for the urban garden amongst neighbours that wanted to have a parcel. Nevertheless, as the lot shares a part of

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garden and a part for its social activities, there was no free space for the development of more parcels. This interest must be framed in the fact that after months of development the act of occupying an empty lot creating a public use was normalised amongst many neighbours that saw it as a possibility rather than an illegal act. In fact, the declining social prestige of banks and the construction sector combined with the inaction of public administration helped to normalise squatting and developing self-organised responses to transform the neighbourhood. In front of the lack of space and the increasing demand, the assembly decided to promote a squatting of another lot near the first one. In July 2012 the second “indignado garden” was created in a much more visible lot. This time the availability of sun and the quality of soil were the factors for selection. The selected lot was formerly part of small individual houses demolished during the speculative bubble for the construction of housing that never took place. The lot occupied a whole side of a small street and was being used as a car park for some time. This second garden has its own assembly, which is formed mainly by families. This garden is less linked to the 15M movement although it reproduces the main elements of the first garden: individual parcels with a community part and a local assembly meeting often to decide common aspects of gardening. Although it organises workshops on gardening, this second garden is less oriented towards social activities and the whole space of the lot is dedicated to crops.

During the last months of 2012 a third lot was occupied near the Social centre “ateneu flor de maig” (May Flower Atheneus). This centre has a long history in Poblenou: it was a workers' cooperative during the first decades of 20th century, that was forced to close with the victory of francoism. With the return of democracy the Flor de maig saw a rebirth as a social centre. The city council paid the rent of the building to the private owners, but in 2012 they decided to cancel the contract and to stop paying the rent. This brought to the 15M assembly and other activists in the neighbourhood to promote social action for the “recovery of the May Flower”, including the squatting of the building, that is since then the main social centre of the whole movement. The squatting of the third lot for urban gardening is linked to the Flor de Maig and because of that its development is controversial. Some of the gardeners see the development of this garden as potentially counterproductive for the consolidation of the Social centre, as it can give more arguments for the eviction. For that reason the garden is not being completely developed. During the development of the fieldwork for this research a fourth lot was being occupied near the first and second community gardens in order to create more space and parcels for neighbours.

Community gardens as a form of citizenship resilience

Once we have depicted the development of urban gardening experiences in Poblenou, we can analyse to what extent these experiences are bringing resources to citizens and what kind of impact they have in their life. Interviews and observation make clear that the main elements that urban gardens bring is on social and emotional terms, rather than production or sustainability oriented. On the material dimension, when asked about the relevance of production, gardeners tend to minimize the impact of the garden in their economies stating that it is impossible to provide enough food from the gardens, but that the process of urban gardening brings them a connection with the earth, and more knowledge about how long it takes to grow vegetables. The satisfaction of employing their time in producing food is one of the most salient aspects of gardening. For gardeners, the development of their own food, even if it is scarce, is seen not only as a reconnection with the environment but the development of a different lifestyle in which you take some time to disconnect from stress of the city to find a small space in which to develop an agricultural activity.

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In terms of immaterial aspects, urban gardens are seen as new democratic spaces based on the commons, in which everybody can participate in the management and the decision-making processes and where nobody owns the land, even though users have the right to develop a parcel. This brings the feeling of sharing responsibility, which reinforces social life, and the feeling of promoting a new space for public use in the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, this element brings controversy that must be solved in the assembly. Who is responsible of what, who has the right to use the space and how, is a question constantly renegotiated amongst the users seeking for a balance between the public orientation of the garden and their daily life as users who have to manage the space.

The social dimension of the urban gardens is clearly seen in the daily life of users, which share information and knowledge about gardening and they comment the most relevant aspects of neighbourhood's daily life. Social life in the gardens start in the afternoon, when most of the users go to take care of their crops, specially in spring and summer, when it is possible to plant a wide range of vegetables. The users are from different social conditions, including retired people, foreign origin neighbours, and young people. The only common element is being from the neighbourhood understood in a wide sense, and this is the element giving legitimacy to use the land and participate in the assembly¹¹. This brings a rich exchange of ideas and different approaches to solve problems, for instance regarding the illegal provision of water for the gardens or the use of techniques and forms of planting. Users themselves consider that their level of knowledge on gardening is low, and that they are involved in a constant process of learning. In this regard, the ones that have more experience have more social prestige within the community and have a greater influence in the decision-making on improving the gardening.

This dimension of social life through sharing is complemented with the efforts of the community garden to be open to the neighbourhood and other institutions. The development of social acts and the creation of workshops for neighbours and schools transform the garden in a social equipment, even though the capacity of social impact is limited by different reasons. In first place the lack of visibility of the space makes difficult to give it centrality as a social space, despite the development of different activities. In second place, the self-organisation dynamic makes the possibilities of social acts, workshops etc. to depend of the capacity of organisers to develop the activity, given the lack of financial resources. In fact, some of the acts are promoted in order to obtain funds for the community garden, used mainly to buy plants, tools, and soil.

The aim for self-organisation brings also a refusal to collaborate with the local administration. In this regard, the assembly refused to participate in an official program for the use of empty spaces in the city, the voids plan, which is based on making a call to civil society for the temporal use of empty spaces of the city. Moreover, the assembly is adopting the strategy of enlarging the occupied land and consolidating the existing experience but without a clear plan for the future. Most of the users consider that they will be evicted from the land and consider that as unavoidable. Thoughts are directed mainly on taking profit from the present situation as the crisis seems to be large and there is no immediate menace of eviction. In this regard, they try to maintain this balance between discretion and public action, for instance not taking water illegally from the city council in order to avoid creating a problem to it, or trying to suffocate problems with immediate neighbours.

Conclusions

The case of Poblenu shows different conclusions regarding urban gardens as a form of resilience.

¹¹ In the gardens, the classical division that envisages the social life in Poblenu between the local neighbours that have strong family roots in the place and the recently arrived neighbours is weaker.

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Firstly, the growth of the experience shows that there was a non-covered demand of agricultural spaces in the city, that emerged only when there was available land due to the collapse of the real estate sector. In the case of Poblenou, families and individuals wanted parcels to develop their agricultural activities but also a social spaces where to learn and exchange knowledge about this issue. In this regard, the official city council gardens, oriented for old people and based on individual parcels is not sufficient to cover this demand.

In second place, the development of urban gardens in poblenou shows that the emergence of urban gardening in the city of Barcelona is related with reappropriation of empty spaces for citizens uses rather than an aim towards constructing the sustainable city or the local production. Despite sustainability is in the discourse of users and promoters of the gardens, the central idea is creating new spaces and contributing to define the model of the city with alternative uses. In this regard, the use of land for agriculture brings the discussion of the existence of common resources that can be managed by neighbours for the common good. The creation of the urban gardens is a way to reclaim the right to the city, that is the right to decide how the city must be shaped (Lefebvre, 1968). In this sense, urban gardens can be framed in a more general movement that can be seen in Barcelona in which neighbours are creating equipments of services based on self-organisation and the commons. In different neighbourhoods of Barcelona we can see experiences in different fields such as the creation of cultural equipments, urban gardens, training resources, cooperatives in social economy and in many other fields.

Most research must be done to analyse to what extent this trend is conneted with the historical development path of the city of Barcelona. In fact, Barcelona was known in the first decades of the twentieth century as the capital city of the anarchist movement in Europe. The anarco-sindicalist movement was not only organising political fight to promote social revolution but a large catalogue of self-organised practices including cooperatives and common spaces. As one of the main industrial districts of the city, Poblenou had a powerful anarco-sindicalist movement that was completely beheaded after the spanish civil war. Nevertheless some authors suggest that this past has an influence in the organisation of neighbourhood movements. In fact, the 15M movement has symbolically connected with this past through different ways. For instance, 15M demonstrations are organised in neighbourhood columns which walk towards the city centre (the column was the basic organisation of the anarchist militia during the Spanish Civil War).

On the other hand, it is necessary to analyse to what extent citizens are able to sustain this experiences through time in a context of crisis and privatisation, and how they develop this sustainability. Even though part of these experiences seek some forms of collaboration with public administration, many others (such are the Gardens in Poblenou) are reluctant to collaborate to avoid cooptation and institutionalisation (Pradel et al., 2013). Nevertheless, in doing so they need continuous suport and militant action from neighbours in order to continue.

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