

SPARKS OF NEW CULTURE + NEW MUNICIPALISM

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The interdependence between culture and municipalism begins with the cultural and creative dimensions of municipalist movement-making, and leads on to the creation and consolidation of a new political culture forged in the institutional practices of municipalism, then eventually to the kinds of cultural policies proposed by the municipalist paradigm. This interdependence can also bring light to the possible darker sides of underpower and localism.

Municipalism understands culture as far broader than the traditional cultural institutions of municipal authorities, going far beyond 'the arts'. It sees culture as the result of the social connections of the city ecology and therefore of the diversity of realities. Cultural policies must therefore reflect the multiplicity of culture-creating actors and the diversity of grassroots, civic and social forms of making culture. The foundation of the municipalist approach to culture is cultural democracy and the cultural commons.

These four short sparks that follow are a snapshot of the ways in which new municipalism and new culture together fire new processes and realities to transform a lived new democracy:

1. [MOVEMENT MAKING](#) = Culture + Critical Thinking + Activism
Yellow Duck Movement, Belgrade + Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca and the Movimientos de Liberación Gráfica, Barcelona
2. [NEW CULTURE OF NEW POLITICS](#) = Culture + Feminisation + Community
Cambiano Messina dal Basso (CMdB), Messina
3. [NEW CULTURAL POLICIES](#) = Decentralisation + Commons + Laboratories
Cultura Viva, Barcelona + ZEMOS98, Seville + 7 ideas
4. [NEW CITIZENSHIP](#) = Culture + Commoning + Confederation
We Are Here, Amsterdam + No.11 Arts, Birmingham + a poem

1. Culture + critical thinking + activism = MOVEMENT MAKING

Across Europe and across the world cities, where most people now live, are not only expanding but are also displacing existing communities and historic civic structures as the inevitable 'price of progress'. The movements of new municipalism have grown from civic and collective activism to resist and reclaim. The fire of this activism has been fuelled by playful and provocative creative and cultural work that has sparked people's imaginations and critical thought. It has been the confluence of social movements, civil society organisations, citizens platforms and cultural groups together that has forged the potential for lasting political change.

Cultural acts and processes have been a core part of political expression, protest and resistance from the year dot with artists acting as dissenters and dissidents. Physical and visual symbolism in civic and political protest has power, it engages and motivates the crowd and attracts media attention, often globally. From the raised fist to taking a knee, graffiti from ancient times through street art and on to Banksy and JR, Rosa Parks standing up by sitting down on a Montgomery bus, the fall of Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad, the Gay Pride flag, umbrellas in Hong Kong, sunflowers in Taiwan, pink knitted pussy hats in Washington....

New democracies depend on a vibrant civil society which engages citizens to challenge and change their community. It is therefore necessary to know the tactics and strategies groups, campaigners, activists and organisers can work with to raise awareness, move people, change their views, and get them engaged. The past decade has witnessed a surge in cultural and artistic activism. But is this tactic useful in movement building, or are there better ways to work?

The Nordic Experiment (Fritt Ord) is an evidence-based, empirical study of the variable impact of creative forms of activism on a public audience in terms of ideas, ideals and actions. Working with partners: ActionAid, RAPolitics and Roskilde University in Denmark, and the Center for Artistic Activism in New York, researchers staged the first ever public experiment of the comparative efficacy and of cultural activism versus more conventional forms of activist interventions.

And guess what - in every quantitative measure the creative approach is more successful than a conventional activist one. And it has a qualitative impact on how people think and feel. People find conventional activists predictable and annoying but creative forms of activism make people curious and more affected; and can -

productively - disturb and unsettle. The full report by the Fritt Ord Nordic Experiment can be found [here](#).

So the work of creative and cultural activists in movement making has a real impact. Not only in inspiration and active participation but also in reflection, critical thinking and changing mindsets for longer-term shifts towards new realities. Cultural forms, acts, images and processes have been a core element of political expression, protest and resistance from the outset in municipalism. They have been a powerful tool in movement making and shaping the expression of municipalism, but these cultural processes also have power in maintaining the spirit of the movements.

Yellow Duck Protests, Belgrade

Ne da(vi)mo Beograd - We won't let Belgrade d(r)own



"A lot of people liked the duck as a symbol as 'duck' has a multi-layered meaning. Sometimes it is ridiculous how they [the police] are bothered by the duck. It looks like they are afraid they will get a direct order to arrest it" Radomir Lazovic, Yellow Duck protester, 2015

The Serbian initiative 'Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own' was formed in 2014 and changed the way citizens think about transparency and their role in relation to urban development projects. It was triggered by a

controversial development project that would transform Belgrade's waterfront into skyscraper luxury apartments and five star hotels. The plan was the biggest development in Serbia's history. It was a familiar tale of top-down regeneration 'revitalising' a 'run down' area of the city with gentrification, demolition, displacement and social cleansing.

The €3.5 billion development would be funded by Emirati petrodollars. It also emerged that the project would be 68% owned by the developer as a private actor capitalising on public resources. Details of the multi-billion-dollar project were not made public, there was no consultation and the demolition took place at night. The project had been classified as 'of national significance' so that it could bypass bureaucratic hurdles, it was taking place behind closed doors.

Opposition and dissent began to grow. It started with the conventional steps: filing official complaints about changes to the urban development plans and requesting public hearings. More than 2,000 complaints were filed but all of them were rejected. The activists then got creative, they organised small performances, such as singing at the public hearing of the plan. Then came the first protest with the big Yellow Duck. A yellow duck the size of a car became the symbol and rallying call for action - funny, friendly and absurd, it sent powerful, compelling and sustained political messages. It was subversive and concealed subtle messages, codes and metaphors and counter-narratives to the status quo. Yellow duck is a symbol of civil resistance and of ongoing fraud and corruption and in Serbian 'duck' also means 'dick'.

Small-scale actions were followed by mass protests in 2015 and at the beginning of 2016 the watershed moment followed the demolition, when citizens showed up in great numbers to protest, demanding resignations and laying criminal responsibility at the door of officials. In the following months, ten major protests took place, each one bigger than the last. At the height of the protests, there were 20,000 people on the streets of Belgrade – the biggest civic protests since those that toppled Slobodan Milošević in 2000.

From the beginning, the initiative included direct actions and mass protests, using legal challenges to the development, as well as iconic symbolism and intense media campaigns. The development which contravenes Serbian legislation is still underway, but the protest has nevertheless injected a new sense of hope onto the streets of Belgrade. It has showed the strength of its citizens willing and ready to take back control of their city, their lives and their future. It has changed mindsets and stirred critical thought and action. Ever since, a growing number of Belgradians have been demanding that citizens be consulted and heard on major urban development projects. Crowds have taken to the street with the famous duck logo to challenge the process of how citizens are left out in major investment and development schemes.

Gradually the Yellow Duck movement has become an example to others, of how local communities lose their grip on their neighborhoods to institutions that hold financial power over them, and how they can creatively reclaim power. Yellow Duck

has subsequently been taken up in many other places around the world, most prominently in Brazil, China and Russia.

PAH - Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (Platform for People Affected by Mortgages) and the Movimientos de Liberación Gráfica (Movement for Graphic Liberation)



"If we are able to imagine another Barcelona, we are capable of transforming it // If we are able to imagine a Barcelona city, we are capable of transforming ourselves" Movimientos de Liberación Gráfica
Barcelona Facebook

The 2008 global financial crisis quickly turned into a housing crisis in Spain because of the preceding growth in home ownership. Franco had created opportunities for people to own a home as a strategy to avoid revolution. Since the transition, parties on both sides had further encouraged home ownership. The financial and housing crisis hit, and rising unemployment left many families facing eviction being unable to pay their mortgages. Previously, if you were unable to pay your mortgage you sold your house, but now no-one wanted to buy. The little-known Spanish foreclosure law allowed banks to evict if an owner defaulted on just one mortgage payment. Ten years after the financial crash, half-a-million people have been evicted from their homes.

In 2009 a small group of housing activists and progressive academics came together to contemplate what could be done. They set up an organisation to enable people to deal with this situation collectively - the PAH, *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (platform for people affected by mortgages). The PAH knew the problem was big and that it was impossible to fix people's housing issues one by one. Instead, they needed to create spaces where people could teach each other how to solve their own problems with others. They held Monday-night assemblies where people who were more experienced with housing issues helped those who were newly subject to evictions. Through working together, people came to realise the source of their problems was public policy. And to solve their own problem, and the broader policy problem, they had to work together.

Dozens of people took direct action to stop evictions, standing in front of threatened premises, risking arrest. The movement had come a long way once

people lost their sense of shame and fear. Everyday people were prepared to take part in high-risk non-violent civil disobedience, and every time they won they became emboldened changemakers. These were not just the immediately dispossessed but also others from the young urban, precarious, creative social sector.

People brought professional skills linked to the production and dissemination of knowledge, language, visual arts, media and journalism. They helped to shape the movement language, ethos, and aesthetics. A group of local artists and designers dubbed themselves the Movimientos de Liberación Gráfica (Movements for Graphic Liberation). This network of graphic artists, designers, animators and sketch artists, extended the visual imagination of the campaigns beyond the official design elements. Using social media platforms such as Facebook groups, Instagram, and Tumblr to discuss ideas and then to share and distribute images. This use of social media alongside multiple informal, often word-of-mouth, and more formal channels, like the workplace, amplified and multiplied the campaign to become viral.

Started in Barcelona and Madrid, the Movimientos de Liberación Gráfica have been replicated in other neighbourhoods and cities with many more artists, designers and cultural producers putting their creative skills in service of the movements. With their explosion of campaign creativity these local platforms have created viral dissemination of imagery more effectively and cheaply than any central campaign. Their imagination and humour has worked to completely transform the sense of what is politically possible and change realities.

2. Culture + Feminisation + Community = NEW CULTURE OF NEW POLITICS

“The fundamental change in the relationship between movements and administration is the centrepiece of the new municipalism. Movements are striving to become the main actors of change in cities.” Cambiano Messina dal Basso

What is clear from the outset is that municipalism proposes a radical shift both in how politics is done and in who ‘does politics’. It foregrounds a more participatory and democratic political culture and an emancipatory political structure, with citizens moving closer to the centre of policy formation and decision making and with city administrations working to safeguard and strengthen The Commons. Rather than marginalising social movements, civil organisations, creative agencies, cultural activists and spirited citizens located far beyond the City Hall, the new municipalism, in a determined spirit of not leaving politics to politicians alone,

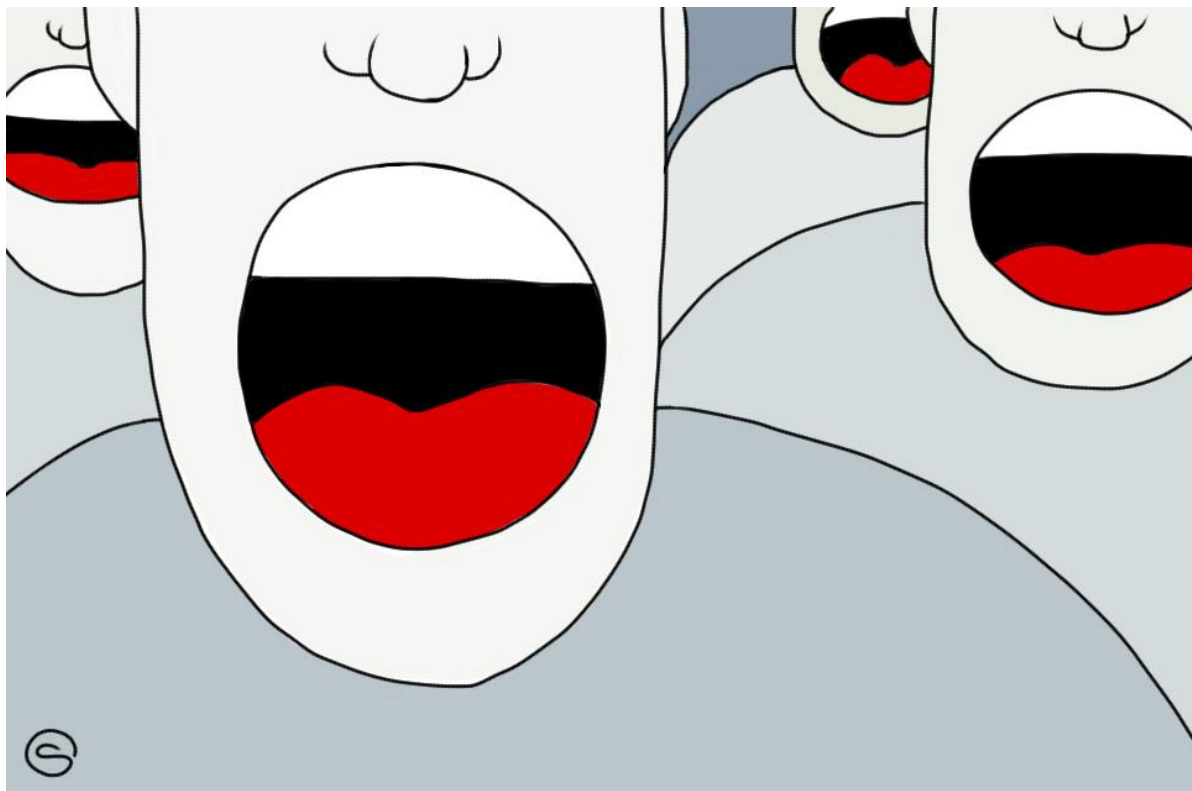
invites unprecedented levels of co-creation, cooperation, collaboration, coalition and co-governance with people and publics of all kinds.

One of the most distinctive dimensions of the municipalist movement is the feminisation of politics which challenges orthodox notions of what precisely is considered to be ‘political’ and who politicians are and might become. This proposed shift is not just concerned with the greater inclusion of women in politics at all stages and on all levels, although this remains critical and urgent wherever you are across the world. In parallel it also questions who has the right to speak and who doesn’t, makes generous and safe space for marginalised voices and perspectives to be expressed and collaboratively builds bold social solidarities and unexpected solutions to time-worn ‘problems’. It rejects more traditional conceptions and practices of political ‘leadership’, and prevailing political cultures, in which aggression, competition, exclusivity, certainty and over-confident personal ambition prevail.

Refreshingly, in contrast to endemic machismo, this emerging feminised political culture is determinedly values-based and proposes a more open, experimental and discursive spirit of collaboration: one in which, as ‘normal’ people, it is possible to express doubts, anxieties, vulnerabilities, confusions and contradictions without fear of retribution. It strives constantly to reach out for unconventional conversations, alliances and relationships far beyond the ingrained, fortified and, increasingly professionalised ‘political class’ that consistently sidelines, censors and silences voices other than its own.

Vitality, this more permeable feminised political culture accommodates and accelerates the essential role that both culture - understood in its broadest sense as people's lived realities, values and capabilities - and communities together have to play in the practice of an emboldened politics of the common good and of 'The Commons'. And in parallel a politics of care and empathy. As a result, this new form of political culture is not machine-like but deeply human, bringing together the personal and the collective with the political, in an enriched, participatory, polycentric and sustainable politics.

Cambiamo Messina dal Basso (CMdB): Let's change Messina from the bottom up



Cambiamo Messina dal Basso (CMdB) is a civic-political movement, consisting of local citizens, cultural and social and environmentalist associations, left-wing parties and movements collectively focused on increasing political participation and the creation of a political platform based on the commons and not on a narrow and fixed political manifesto. Building upon the movement's previous experiences and multiple campaigns, CMdB emerged in early 2013 with intention to run for local elections though with very little hope of success, given that the city had a history of

extremely low engagement in conventional politics and very low turnout at elections, in a community scourged, over generations, by organised crime, racketeering, corruption and misrule, from its streets to the highest levels of society and politics, and a community impoverished yet further by the comprehensive imposition of austerity.

Unexpectedly then, in June 2013 CMdB won the elections, becoming the first civic-political municipalist movement to run a major city in Italy. Their victory kick-started a bold five-year experiment in shifting the way that politics is carried out: to put it simply, politics not from the top-down but determinedly from the bottom-up: the 'Under Power' in the DNA of municipalist movements around the world. This was seen to be the only way to change the city, igniting the rich and broad, yet normally under-valued and excluded, human assets and creative capabilities of sidelined citizens in the process of this intended fundamental change.

In one of his first acts in reaching City Hall the new Mayor Renato Accorinti, declaring "we are all mayors" and "this is your house", had the security barriers at the building's entrances removed as a visual and physical signal of the intended opening up of the normally-fortified institution to the citizens. Soon after the elections, in an unprecedented act - and in parallel a further signal of changes to come - Popular Assemblies were organised in neighbourhoods bringing together people who had previously little experience of politics to discuss issues of deep personal concern to them, their families and their neighbourhoods. Many of those attending had not had any direct contact with the administration or elected officials, with those 'in power', ever before.

Simultaneously the multi-disciplinary 'Messina Laboratory for the Commons and the Participatory Institutions', facilitated by CMdB member and Deputy Mayor for Culture, Federico Alagna, was created: a citizens' forum, as a "collective expert for the Administration", charged with the task of exploring the implementation of participatory budgeting, drafting regulations on the shared use of the commons and promoting civic participation tools. In other fields, CMdB took a wide range of very practical actions of everyday benefit to citizens: they reduced abusive urban speculation, encouraged community-led actions such as the cleaning up of parks and civic spaces, promoted territorial safeguards, waste sorting passed from 4% to 12%, a record for Messina, and kerbside collections were introduced into some neighbourhoods with a high level of take up, . In addition the the city's main theatre was reopened - which had previously been shut down due to lack of funds - as a civic gathering point. And processes started for the 'stabilisation' of the municipality's temporary workers and creating housing for homeless people. For

Mayor Accorinti the priority was “putting politics at the service of the common good and giving back to the city what belongs to it”.

After five years CMdB lost in the Messina elections of June 2018 but this disappointment has not in any way dimmed their values, convictions or energies. They see it as “an electoral loss but not a political loss” and recognise that, as a collective movement, they have learned so much, both positive and negative, during their years ‘in power’. The key learning is that a fundamentally transformative politics cannot come about without deep and sustained immersion in, and re-ignition of, the culture and cultures of a place. And that leadership has to be inclusive, shared and constantly negotiated rather than imposed, but also that, with pressure to ‘deliver’, and quickly, and to deal with unforeseen emergencies, things are never as easy as they sound. In order to avoid the ‘local trap’, of being an isolated, inward-facing, selfish and parochial island of autonomy, it is vital to build multiple connections outwards and contribute to the creation of a new politics of networked, generous, translocal power. There are and always will be tensions, and at times open conflict, between being in a movement and being in administration with all its in-built constraints and time-honoured hierarchies, procedures and delaying mechanisms - and, for those most closely involved, progress was often achieved at great personal cost - yet simultaneously, the freer, more creative and more open approaches of the movement proved to be very effective in countering a political system that inherently resists dynamism, spontaneity and risk.

For Federico Alagna losing the elections “...is but the end of a cycle. It is the beginning of a new challenge, of a new way of interpreting the relationship between our movement and the governance of the city”. Consequently, rather than becoming dispirited, CMdB feel strongly today that, collectively and building on what they have learned through being ‘in power’, they will continue to have a lot to say and, critically to do, in terms of their city and the ongoing close involvement of Messinese citizens in long-term conversations and decision-making. This remains the most distinctive and significant aspect of this movement-driven municipalism.

3. Decentralisation + Commons + Laboratories = NEW CULTURAL POLICIES

'A municipalist cultural policy seems to be concurrent and complimentary to open ways in which people strive to collaborate with each other, intimately and at a distance, in order to make their lives in generous but meaningful and necessary ways.

A municipalist cultural policy differs, considering other means and ends to culturally experiment with, and through which to formally construct being and doing life across places, for common people, rather than for cultural speculation. This cultural formalisation might co-facilitate how common residents co-produce ways of economically, socially and meaningfully living in, across and beyond the city.'

Marc Herbst, Notes Towards a Municipalist Cultural Policy

Radical municipalist policies prioritise giving people the capabilities (agency, space, skills, tools) to access and create their own social, economic, political and cultural lives in communities.

The political culture of municipalism shapes the creation and implementation of urban civic and public policies. Rather than imposing remotely decided policies, municipalism first asks who should be involved in their creation. Creating public policies in the spirit of feminisation happens through a dialogue of all those affected, working with and through a new urban subjectivity of mediators, facilitators and moderators able to skillfully carry out collective and creative processes of social and political dialogue. Solutions are then prototyped, evaluated, with continuous citizens' participation in the implementation of public policies, because the impact of these policies belong to the citizens.

These processes and practices, although radical in mainstream politics, will sound very familiar to the majority of creative and cultural makers. A new cultural~political practice has been growing: a set of practices and organisational solutions that follow the principles of participation, critical thinking, empowering others, creating community and ultimately transforming lived realities and possibilities.

These new cultural practices emerged primarily outside of the institutions of power - in social movements, informal groups, civil society organisations and social economy entities - and are therefore precarious. As bottom-up practices, they are also innovating in the production, distribution and governance of culturally-derived Commons.

To enable these practices to develop and, consequently, permanently influence the political and democratic culture, they need to be valued and validated by public

policies. These policies must also work to deny the growth of other players already on the field using similar means towards much darker ends.

Today, municipalism is an essential, if not the only, context in which such policies can be understood, developed and implemented. The cultural policies of municipalism validate culture-creating activities that care for the common good and equitable regeneration, and undermine the primacy of 20th century models of cultural~economic speculation, extraction and commodification.

These policies must also democratise the existing culture and infrastructure for the 'arts' and creative production. It is important to introduce innovative organisational, institutional and intermediary entities, models and solutions focused on participation, democratisation of decision-making. And to prototype the commoning of organisational solutions to decentralise the existing arts and culture.

So what does that mean in practice and where are the possibilities? Municipalist movements all over the world have understood well, and collaborated closely with, creative and cultural activists to build imaginative 'common sense' campaigns, commitment and momentum.

But what is done, in the confluence of new culture and new municipalism, to give generous but meaningful ways to construct strategies and policies for being and doing in the life of citizens? What is the experience of working from an acknowledgment that culture and the production of relationships are tied together in meaningful ways and that ownership over how to live and openly exchange with the world changes realities?

Cultura Viva , Barcelona

The City as a Laboratory for Cultural Democracy

'Four months. Long days. A weekly space open for exploration, work and impact on ways of managing and participating in culture. The articulation of relations between public and community through the generation of spaces of innovation. From research to experience. From the experience to knowledge and transformation: the city as a laboratory for cultural democracy' Cultura Viva

Cultura Viva is a weekly space to explore, work and change ways of managing and participating in culture in Barcelona. It brings together multiple entities and social and cultural organisations in a transversal programme coordinated by the Institute of Culture of Barcelona in collaboration with different areas of the City Council. Working with the diversity of the cultural and creative ecosystem of communities,

institutions and independent spaces, it tries to strengthen decentralised cultural production and participation.

The themes being explored in the laboratory are: democracy, citizen innovation, diversity, community management and new cultural, social and solidarity economies. Week by week, research and action spaces are convened focussing on practical and neighbourhood issues such as viable community TV and radio stations, knowledge and network sharing, joint programming, legal frameworks for creative community projects, and articulating communities through creative processes.

Alongside these research and action days, concrete projects are being put into practice to show innovative possibilities for cultural policy in the city. These are also developed with and from the citizenry and in collaboration with cultural, creative and social entities already working with these agendas.

A programme of deeper, longer-term research projects with academic and other cultural partners in the city is being developed as part of the programme. These researches include:

- *A New Economy for a New Culture: Innovations in the economies of culture in Barcelona* - An analysis of cultural and economic innovations based on emerging economic models and new forms of cultural production. With the Open University of Catalonia
- *Cultural Policies and Common Goods: Practices and Itineraries for Community Management in Barcelona* - Co-operation and community management practices of culture proliferate but this diverse reality opens up a series of questions and challenges. This is true for the communities themselves as well as for the administration and cultural policies. With Artibarri, La Hidra Cooperativa
- *Cooperative Culture: Research on Cooperativism in Culture in Barcelona* - This research aims to explore and expand the reality of cultural cooperativism in Barcelona and its environment. This covers both the qualitative diagnosis of the initiatives that make up this socioeconomic field in the territory, as well as its dynamics of sectoral and geographical inter-cooperation. With The Invisible City

ZEMOS98 and Cultural Commons, Seville

Festival, lab, studio, TV and radio station, collective, open source cultural intermediary



'We try to create critical thinking, we try to deconstruct the mass-media messages, we try to weave networks, relationships and communities. We try to work in the intersections and margins. We try to work (g)locally, behind the borders. We try to take care of our networks and we try to reuse and remix all of our contents. We try to organize a Festival every year and we try to create a New Media Laboratory called 98LAB to learn about this things. So, basically, we try things.' ZEMOS 98

ZEMOS98 is a cultural and political collective that has been working from Seville, Spain on local, national and European projects since 1998. They have produced 17 editions of an underground independent media festival on the commons, feminism, informal education and other issues. Their cultural work develops citizen participation on the issues that shape shared futures and with local councils they develop participatory processes. In collaboration with A Coruña, Barcelona and Madrid city councils they are supporting the development of culture plans co-designed by the sector and citizens.

As a politically engaged collective, Zemos98 creates critical thinking and shares open culture by working in new ways that redefine how cultural policy can be understood and who delivers it. They believe that, occasionally, private initiatives can undertake projects with the vocation of a public service. As intermediaries they are building new solidarity models, knowing that they are needed to support the precarious makers of the new culture and politics, especially after the economic crisis.

From its beginning ZEMOS98 has been defined by working on projects that serve the citizenship and a critical production of knowledge: books, radio programmes, thoughts, meetings for a cultural commons. They invoke copyleft and release the source code of their research and work, to invite copy, remix and improve. Their cultural commons is a territory of production and research between collective profit and bonds with various public institutions. To stimulate a social and supportive economy, ZEMOS98 as a cultural intermediary, works as a social economy entity where profits are reinvested in community, social and political activity.

Their model of building critical thinking and community solidarity provides a platform for multiple actors and activity including:

ZEMOS Festival is an annual event in Seville that has outlined a theoretical, practical, political and vital new culture. The festival has evolved into a space to rethink culture, politics and social relations. It acts as a tool to amplify open culture and critical thinking and reach more people.

98lab is an open laboratory that works as an space for investigation, thinking and production of culture and new media outside of formal education. It focuses on

practices ranging from digital and audiovisual culture, to feminisation, models of civic participation. It is also a container for educational activities, workshops and residencies.

Recordar TV was an internet television station built up from the perspective of elderly citizens. A tool to provide technological capacities to a collective of the community largely deprived of this access, but also to promote their stories, their memory and their contribution to understanding the present.

4. Culture + Commoning + Confederation = NEW CITIZENSHIP

'The trepidation is that these new municipalist movements are a return to a parochial politics. Common arguments are that these municipal initiatives do not go beyond an attempt to build little anarchist or socialist islands of autonomy, isolated from a more substantial internationalist political project. There is also a latent danger of municipalist projects falling into the "local trap" — erroneously claiming the municipality to have some form of inherently "progressive" qualities — rather than adopting it as a strategic site for social transformation.'

Laura Roth, Internationalism and the New Municipalism, October 2018

New municipalism, as anti-authoritarian, anti-racist movements all over the world, are working to take power where they live. But there is also a toxic strain of localism - self-described localist movements as well as nationalist movements - that simultaneously have also won elections with xenophobic and fascist platforms and that have cynically and dishonestly appropriated the more typically progressive, anti-authoritarian language of 'autonomy' and 'direct democracy'. If a diverse, egalitarian, and ecological new municipal politics is to be genuine, then we need strategies and tactics to address these dark and threatening tendencies.

Social isolation feeds a steady supply of alienated people to the far-right, and their feelings of wanting to 'take back control'. New municipalism seeks parity in all spaces, acts and roles to change the way politics is done through horizontal decision-making, withdrawing from confrontational approaches and embracing diversity as a natural element of culture, society and politics. Creative and cultural spaces for collective making, imagining and questioning are all ways of offering people means to build new relationships and alliances - across gender, race, class and all other forms of difference - and address loneliness, isolation and manipulative and punitive 'othering'.

One of the biggest issues of our era is migration forced by climate, economic and political instability and violence. New municipalism, through Sanctuary Cities, Rebel Cities and multiple initiatives of solidarity with 'others' (refugees or immigrants) has sought a positive response. It has recognised that municipalities have a great responsibility and capability to confront global problems, and that municipalist organisations and governments must support one another in order to reinforce themselves at other levels. In doing so it has also affirmed an internationalism or global horizon of looking outwards for development as well as looking into its own localities. Interdependence is what makes municipalism unique among locally oriented political ideas. Rather than withdrawing from global affairs and obligations, movements look to the commons and confederation to radically

restructure the balance of power in how decisions are made towards ordinary people wherever they are, be that locally, regionally, or globally.

Inclusive by nature, the 'commons' enables grassroots political participation by affected individuals and communities. But this new narrative is also grounded in scalable practices that are accessible to change makers and civil-society organisations on many different localities. 'Confederation' is the defining principle of community autonomy, but also of interdependence.

But there is a third 'c' in the equation, 'culture', in the game plan for building a new political vision fit for the challenges of our time for the protection of human rights and radical democracy. Constructing open processes for all people to collaborate and co-create with each other, intimately and at a distance, within the city and beyond it, in order to shape their lives in generous but meaningful and necessary ways, is essential to the new municipalism.

A City Made by People: We Are Here (WAH), Amsterdam Collective action by and with migrants and refugees in the city

*'People ARE present when they are not hiding. People are WE when they are together. People are HERE when they move together. WE are more....We Are Here has given inspiration and a window to see another world as well as offering us a mirror to see ourselves and our society in a different light. **Now, We Are Everywhere.'***

Jo Van Der Spek, 2017



Since 2011 irregular migrants, refused asylum seekers, undocumented aliens along with existing citizens of Amsterdam, have become a movement: We Are Here. They have made themselves collectively visible, out in the open as a 'show-and-tell' methodology to be recognised as individual people. They say 'we do not count numbers of 'others' because everybody counts'.

Their collective resistance started by occupying the Diakoni Garden in Amsterdam. They were tired of living in invisibility and decided to put themselves and the inhuman situation in which they are forced to live in the spotlight. They said 'we are here, we are human beings, and we deserve to be treated with respect'. Soon after, the group started to squat empty buildings in Amsterdam, taking their destiny into their own hands. The squatting, of over thirty buildings over the years, also serves as a mode of resistance. By presenting themselves in the spotlight and performing their existence, they aim to put pressure on the media and politicians to also take responsibility for the situation they are in.

Mainstream politicians and the media formulate the 'problem' in the abstract, as too many migrants, too much trouble, risk and, a reluctance to see and hear the personal and concrete. But migration is a personal story, a challenge for our relationship to the other. WAH is about presence and presentation. It is the visible demonstration, that something is wrong with the system and a creative call for citizens to act together for political change. Being visible as a group is the basis of presentation. Presence and presentation has meant a place, a building, becoming a 'visible collective of the refused' and creative acts of making and hanging banners, making and handing out flyers and co-creating actions.

But co-creation is difficult. Lots of great actions, ideas, initiatives and artworks were proposed by well-meaning students, occupiers, mothers, artists and teachers but many in the refugee collective were reluctant to go along with these for this is part of the problem. Some had their own ideas about what to do and do together. The power to define is the struggle of people that are usually rendered invisible, unheard, disposable. This can be a progressive or a retrogressive power, depending on how and with whom it is shared and shaped.

New democracy starts from the ground up, when normal people have the capability to take up their own destiny and create a coalition to reshape realities but this is complex work. The movements need to learn more together, across geographies and context about how true co-creation and agency in the shaping and presentation of our individual and collective stories and imagined futures really works. A contribution to the cultural commons on co-creation values, practices and strategies would be invaluable across the confederation of new municipalism, and to inspire and inform other movements and administrations.

No.11 Arts, Birmingham, UK (not to be confused with Alabama) **Shaping cultural commoning for diversity**

'any venue housing an institution dedicated to the arts is no more a centre of culture than any other city location where citizens live, work or gather together.' No.11 Arts. 2018

No. 11 Arts is a Birmingham-based practice that is helping to shape processes of cultural commoning. They work to foster a shared and mutual power balance between two forms of possible authority: practices and processes that come from capability in arts and culture, and relevance and vitality that comes from the full range of citizens' lived experience.

Culture is a lived and shared resource because it is always the product of a group of people or a community. In every form, culture requires at least some degree of human interaction or transmission in order to be produced and shared. At the same time, any culture acquires a value for the people who share and adopt it. Any form of culture therefore helps express the identity of groups and communities, either their exceptionalism or their diversity. Cultural commons are ways of managing the sharing of information or cultural resources and ensuring all citizen's ability to produce and share.

With this understanding of cultural Commons, No. 11 Arts worked with a consortium of local universities to conduct open-ended 'creative consultations' with all kinds of citizens about re-shaping urban services, such as transport, policing, housing, open spaces, vagrancy. Artist-facilitators co-designed activities with contrasting resident groups, sharing processes for them to articulate how they saw themselves in relation to the provision of urban services and specifically how they could be more actively engaged. The groups chose to engage in yarn-bombing their neighbourhood, composing rap lyrics about the buses and creating a community quilt highlighting the diversity of what, and who, they valued in their environment. Citizen perspectives on urban service providers, revealed through these activities, were notably different from the ways in which providers see citizens.

The programme co-created with local people in open-ended ways so that they acquired the capacity for invention and sense of empowerment necessary for sustained civic activism. Engaging people in creative activity often feels safe and non-intrusive and welcomes people from diverse background and cultures to a shared activity. Very often people brought together through an creative or cultural activity then begin to discuss other things that concern them. For example, people may be so caught up in the activity of sewing textiles that they forget about obvious differences and simply chat away about things that are important to them whether that is local statutory services, concerns about their children/grandchildren or needs linked to health.

Collaborating with three widely differing communities, No. 11 Arts was able to show that citizens, regardless of their collective profiles, urban locations and diversified personal circumstances, had strong, though markedly different, views on urban services. Young black men, for example, are concerned about lack of WiFi on buses because it impedes their music-making which they see as a way out of their immediate environment. Dispirited people who feel marginalised, ignored and neglected are nevertheless finding, as far as they are able, their own ways of imagining and improving their quality of life and meeting what they see as immediately local needs.

A Poem

by Catriona Heatherington

*Our Birmingham of a thousand trades
Booms out its constant serenades,
Winding and whirring,
Making and building,
Grinding and stirring,
Shaking and gilding,
This uniquely urban symphony
With hubbed and lugged crescendos
And flyovered cacophony,
But so many speak in staccattoed diminuendos,
Too far out and distant,
no longer clear,
Lost in the silence of invisibility,
Suburban voices we cannot hear,
In the bold vastness of our city,
So we form the pole of a listening arts umbrella
By binding ourselves tight and strong together,
Then, unfurling our hearts across the circumference of Birmingham's boundary,
We make a giant whispering gallery,
So the hesitant and lonely,
Can be heard with perfect clarity
In our cupola of artistic creativity
Where co-design grows fresh community
And welcomes spoken in so many different serenades
Become our language of a thousand trades*