

Decentralisation + Commons + Laboratories = NEW CULTURAL POLICIES

By Shelagh Wright and Peter Jenkinson

'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.



Stills of the [video of Zemos98](#)

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



HABITAR (Heaven is a place on Earth with you), Ana Maeso, Marta Girón, Marta López (2014, Spain)

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.