

Radical Urban Transformations

Narrative Report

May 9th, 2019 / Raphael Hoetmer

Introduction

The Global working group Beyond Development realized its third meeting in May 2018 in Barcelona to discuss the challenges and opportunities for the defense, expansion, articulation and building of urban alternatives in the contemporary world. In our meeting in 2017 in Quito, Ecuador we established a common political and analytical framework to guide our collective work, and also identified crucial strategic issues and challenges that needed to be engaged (Lang 2018). We chose Barcelona as the place to take on the discussion on radical urban transformation, to allow dialogues with activists, intellectuals, politicians and experiences of resistance and alternative building in one of the most progressive cities in the world, which currently is governed by the Barcelona en Comú political movement with clear roots in popular struggles.

The Global working group seeks to analyze and critique the global political-economy and its social, political and environmental consequences, from the diagnostic that the world is facing a civilizational crisis caused by the notions of unlimited growth that guide are societies. In this context the group constitutes a space for learning and interchange among activist-organizers and activist-researchers (and the multiple combinations of these identities) from different parts of the world on the possibility of building alternatives to capitalist-colonial-patriarchal status quo. The group seeks to visibilize existing alternatives, and create strategic thinking to multiply, expand, connect and deepen them.

Our meeting in Barcelona was also informed by (many times participatory) research processes on alternatives in urban contexts: community currencies and inclusive credit in Kenya, the 15th Garden movement for Food Sovereignty in the context of war in Syria, popular markets in Quito, Ecuador and India as alternatives to oligopolistic modernization, experiences of radical urban transformation for sustainability and de-patriarchalization in Brasil's popular communes against policies of dispossession, and the building of local solidarity, struggles and alternatives by afro-american communities in Detroit, Birmingham and Jackson, and in a popular neighborhood in Lagos, Nigeria. These experiences of urban alternatives will be introduced in part III of this text.

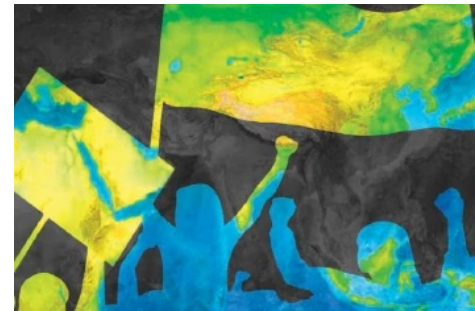
This thematical meeting sought to deepen our knowledge on one of the crucial issues that came up in our earlier meetings, where a big share of the alternatives discussed were related to rural areas developing narratives and practices based on local autonomy and culture, or on national processes of social transformation through government. Urban alternatives, although present in the Quito discussion, resulted more complex and challenging. Particularly, it was stated that the transformation of the countryside disposes of several strong political concepts and narratives, as Buen Vivir, food sovereignty, agro-ecology, which might be less developed in the cities where hegemonic thought has been overwhelming. Therefore, the notion of the commons that inspired local transformative struggles in Barcelona, and elsewhere, seemed a good entrance to the discussion on possible radical urban transformation.

Our initial central collective research questions were: What conditions and strategies allow radical transformation in urban contexts? What kind of economic and political processes can sustain urban alternatives? What urban realities does the countryside need in order to re-dignify rural life and the rural-urban relations ? What theoretical and political frameworks are useful for the building of urban alternatives?

The current text, is organized according to four dimensions of urban alternatives that were very present in our collective analysis: 1) reclaiming our living spaces; 2) building communitarian economies; 3) transforming urban-rural relations and dynamics; 4) taking the power back. These four chapters are preceded by a general analysis of urban contexts and challenges for alternatives, and the text is closed by reflections on the strategies that allow the building of alternatives.

Building on our collective analytical framework

Our meeting also sought to continue our earlier discussions in Quito and Brussels, where we have seen how radical multidimensional transformation is imperative to assure a just and democratic future for humankind. The following five key processes of social change



Logic of social change	Strategy	Urban transformative politics
Left politics oriented at replacing state power	Tradition of left wing hypothesis of taking state power through elections and previously revolutions, enabling social change from those spaces of government	Left wing parties have been governing cities around the world, implementing more or less transformative policies
Transformative politics: power: radical emancipation	Networks and movements that seek to subvert global political processes through mobilizations and strategies	Alongside struggles rarely fought their battles in globalized cities, e.g. Occupy
Social movements	Through the appropriation and transformation of some parts of the power through processes of greater control and activity from below, where - particularly - local governments enable incentives to initiate (or not) new democratic, ecological and sustainable futures	Barcelona en Comú is only one example of this political perspective, which seeks to govern cities in new ways to overcome some traditional flaws of left wing politics, creating new ways of common governance
Radical politics	Social movement politics seek social, political and cultural change through organization and mobilization	Historical, LGBT, environmentalist, animalist, human rights and anti-state movements, but also movements against gentrification and neoliberalism not only have cities as their central stage. They also dispute the future of how social relations around the world, contributing to more diverse and democratic cities
Radical politics	Understood as the capacity of communities to create, relations and practices for autonomous emancipation that can inspire broader social change	From the question of movement to social and cultural community centers, all sorts of urban communities are and urban gardening, open production, caring / making, education and pedagogical politics have and are shaping urban contexts around the world
Daily life political change	Pushing for social change through our daily practices and relationships	Other communities also shape urban contexts through their environmental, relational and consumption practices to an important extent

are required to strengthen justice, dignity, democracy and sustainability of life: i) decolonization; ii) anti-capitalism; iii) anti-racism; iv) dismantling patriarchy; v) transformation of predatory relations with Nature. The Group shares the conviction that radical change, understood as the transformation from the roots of our society, economy and politics, is imperative if we wish to put a halt to the current social-ecological destruction performed by our civilization in crisis.

At the same time, the preconditions for such a change are very difficult. Power and resources are more concentrated than ever before in global elites and economic groups, and collective imaginaries of development, consumerism and individualism are deeply rooted in the subjectivities of the majority of world population. Militarism, the spread of corporate technology and the mass media are enabling factors for these negative conditions, and a fierce global counter offensive of reactionary and conservative forces is pushing back or battling emancipatory change in many parts of the world.

Our earlier discussions showed that in spite of differences in our stances towards these different strategies, we agree that the current historical moment implies different temporalities of transformation which are best met by different, eventually complementary political strategies. In the short term, there is a need to stop the accelerated ecological, political and social processes of destruction and dispossession, through defensive struggles which also protect the conquests of social movements in previous cycles of struggle. Spaces of autonomy, self-organization and extension of the commons need to be defended actively, as they are the building stones for deeper change.

The long-term multidimensional transformation will require other, offensive political struggles, capable of creating new ways of being and consciousness, new institutions, new modes of production and practices of distribution and consumption. The required political imaginary needs to go far beyond the realities of the Nation-State, the language of human rights, and the current processes and practices of production, consumption and distribution, to be able to respond fully to the civilizational and ecological crisis we are facing. Such a radically different society is already being born and even practiced historically, in numerous local processes of prefigurative politics. Political perspectives of plurinationality, polycentricity, Buen Vivir or biodemocracy and their concrete practices allow the possibility to overcome the limitations of both modern liberal and Marxist eurocentric political thought. Throughout our meetings, we saw that this requires deep and significant dialogues between cultures, political traditions and social movements.

Our group does not envision any encompassing narrative of change, as the narrative of socialism provided during the late 19th and 20th centuries in many parts of the world. The necessary strategies will differ according to each local and historical context, but the challenge of nurturing relationships between them, of building ecosystems of change composed by different actors, strategies and scales, is crucial. The kind of alliances we need are those that connect resistances and alternative building, on the basis of shared principles that inspire localized practices.

Finally, in our earlier meetings we became very aware that our dialogues and discussions did not take place in a homogeneous space and community, as never is the case. The choice of words or elaboration of lists and categories, always reflects a certain geopolitics of knowledge that we need to take into account in our interactions (Lang 2018). Our group seeks to build a dialogue of knowledges in between different perspectives and types of persons.

1. Understanding the context: tendencies that define our cities

Contemporary cities are the result of a variety of historical processes that provoked a general tendency towards urbanization in the world. State building processes in general, and colonization in particular led to the centralization of power in administrative centers oriented at ruling general populations and wider territories. The consolidation and expansion of capitalism required the concentration of populations to allow their exploitation as workers, as well as to constitute markets of consumers. The impoverishment and expropriation of territories through colonization and later by large scale economic operations or development projects expelled populations from the countryside and their traditional communities, creating large scale migration within countries to the principal cities, as well as towards cities in richer countries in the region or far abroad. In the last decades, globalization even further concentrated services, economic and political power, in global cities that sustain the networks and flows of contemporary world society.

In practice this means that cities have expanded through a process of expropriation and destruction of communities, and by the destruction and disciplining of nature. Also, these cities necessarily established exploitative and unequal relationships with the countryside that provides them with resources, and at the same time, is used many times for the externalization of solid waste, waste water and other destructive tendencies.

Capitalist urbanization also shaped modern gender and family patterns, as it initially implied the enclosure of women in patriarchal nuclear family households, in charge of caring for the children and the working husband or as maids, without proper payment and social and political participation. Later, women were incorporated in the labor force maintaining unequal payment and social recognition for their work, and with growing but very limited access to decision making and power within the corporate sector. The segments of paid labor to which women were incorporated also followed lines of racial/ethnic segregation.

As such, global urbanization maintains mutual constituent relationships with the main patterns of domination in our societies, shaping their contemporary development, as well as being constituted through them. Seen through this lens, urbanization has been

stimulated and shaped by violent processes of the expansion of capital, as well as of colonial and imperial power which have reorganized territories and populations in accordance with the interests of global and national (male and white) elites.

At the same time, contemporary cities are also the result of a particular imaginary of success and progress, implemented through new technologies and practices of urban planning, design and construction to allow bigger populations to live together. Cities became the symbol of modernization, implemented through cement, roads, cars, public works, the development water and energy grids and of health and educational services– of course, in very unequally distributed ways-, and new patterns of mass consumption emerged, constituting progressively what we have been calling an imperial mode of living.

Effectively, capital, labor, power and services were concentrated in the cities (and within cities in certain areas), so that the possibilities for economic and social advancement also were urbanized to a large extent. These material conditions were reinforced by a public and political discourse of modernity and development that presented the cities as spaces of opportunity and progress. All of this inspired many people to move to the cities in search of a better future.

The growing cities also created new challenges in terms of control of ever more diverse and concentrated populations. Cities have been governed through diverse regimes of discipline and power, based on classist, caste and racist segregation. Urban poverty can be seen as a condition which is actively produced through processes of dispossession and exclusion. Different forms of repression and violence are used to control urban territories. At the same time, capitalism has naturalized poverty in racist, meritocratic ways, using the notion of poverty to legitimize processes of militarization, etc.

Cities have also seen intense political disputes on their future, as urban populations have organized to meet the challenges of everyday life, resist dispossession and defend their rights. In our Quito meeting in 2017 we identified six different logics of political transformation present in contemporary struggles –articulated and combined in diverse ways in different struggles-, which are also present in urban contexts (see table I). New modes of struggle were developed through the intercultural dialogue between very different people living together in the cities.

So, cities also became places for self-organization, intercultural dialogue and community building, based on solidarity, reciprocity and mutual support, to create minimal levels of resilience and security. These practices were many times rooted in previous traditions of communitarian organization in the countryside, but new forms of organization also emerged from them to confront the challenges of life in urban territories. Urban struggles for the rights to housing, health, adequate labor conditions, education, etc. shaped cities in a new way.

Contemporary cities face different related challenges in these historical processes: 1) the violent restructuring of territories and populations due to the logics of speculation and financialization of housing, land and debt, which expulse populations from their neighborhoods to allow capital accumulation and large scale development projects; 2) regimes of criminalization of impoverishment, repression and militarization to “control” urban territories; 3) the persistence of extreme inequality, racism and patriarchal oppression in urban populations; 4) the expansion of a culture of hyper individuality, constant acceleration and consumerism that shapes our daily relations in a competitive and violent way. 5) Cities also maintain extremely predatory relationships with the countryside and nature, through practices of dumping, pollution, and the general urban metabolism.

Cities are thus built on a complex dialectics between individual aspirations for progress and other cultural models and collective needs. Cities have been shaped both by the projects of domination of economic and political elites, and by social struggles for their democratization. In societies where democracy has deepened, cities also became more democratic, whereas in more authoritarian societies, cities remain more violent as well. Urban citizens try to navigate these complex landscapes, balancing individual needs and communitarian solutions in many different ways.

2. Six experiences of urban alternatives

Our collective discussion on the possibilities and challenges for radical urban transformation was rooted in seven different studies that were realized in a participatory way on urban alternatives around the globe:

- Community currencies and inclusive credit in Kenya
- The 15th Garden movement for Food Sovereignty in the context of war in Syria
- Popular markets in Quito, Ecuador as alternative to oligopolistic modernization
- Popular markets in India
- Radical urban transformation for sustainability and de-patriarchalization in Brasil's popular communes against policies of dispossession
- The building of local solidarity, struggles and alternatives by afro-american communities in Detroit, Birmingham and Jackson
- The defense of space and identity in a popular neighborhood in Lagos, Nigeria.

3. Reclaim our living spaces

So contemporary cities seem to be rather hostile environments for the building of alternatives, but they also constitute a fundamental and indispensable element for any strategy for social-ecological transformation in the contemporary world. Two principal ways of emergence of alternative practices appeared in our discussion and studies, which share political horizons based on notions of dignity, territory, sovereignty and self-determination.

On the one hand, the precariousness and insecurity of living conditions in contemporary cities pose challenges for survival that become a fundamental basis for the building of communitarian practices of solidarity and mutual support against exclusion, insecurity and impoverishment. In situations when everything is missing, only community allows survival; this results in diverse practices like community strategies for neighborhood security, collective initiatives against food insecurity or for child care, collective improvisation around basic services, the building of local spaces for arts, culture, sports or education, the organization of local productive spaces for agro-ecology, and many other things. Our studies showed, very similar communitarian practices of solidarity in Afro-American, Nigerian, Brazilian and Kenyan cities of mutual support and care, collective production and the building of alternative economies that allow dignity to impoverished and excluded peoples.

These concrete practices of resilience and communitarian living can prefigure broader changes in society. Particularly in contexts of crisis, like in 2001-2 in Argentina, in 2016 in Greece, and even in the context of war in Syria (as chapter .. shows), these practices of self-organization have sustained the lives of very large portions of urban populations. They can also become institutionalized in permanent markets, initiatives for collective food distribution and preparation to share costs –like the popular kitchens throughout the world-, in solidarity economy initiatives, or cultural and educational spaces, which at the same time constitute spaces and processes for collective decision making.

The other main source for the building of alternatives is the resistance of local populations against dispossession, eviction, exploitation and violence. Community organizing emerges to defend and control collective spaces, and through this collective visions of the future, as the urban resistance movement in Brazil clearly shows. Particularly resistance against eviction at the same time generate debates on alternatives to the neoliberal and privatized city. Our debates clearly indicate that there is no way out of dispossession and exclusion without access to land and properties (though not necessarily in an individualized way). Land occupations and the protection against eviction are about defending communitarian properties that allow the building of better individual and collective living conditions. As the Brazilian processes show, these resistances do not necessarily imply ruptures with the State, as local populations want the State to provide services like schools and healthcare as well. However, it does mean a qualitatively different relation with the State, based on a collectively organized community demands and conditioning State presence within the occupied territories.

Both ways of alternative building, are based i) on the strengthening of relationships and solidarities that allow the building of communities; ii) the strengthening of the link between community and space, by building territorial identities; iii) the strengthening of autonomous practices that improve concrete living conditions of the members of the communities; iv) the building of a local culture and identity. All of this allows the mobilized people to gain control over their lives and territories (sovereignty), against dynamics of expropriation and alienation, and simultaneously to develop collective visions of desirable futures for their territories (dignity and living well).

Without community, no alternative political power is possible. Communities allow the collective imagining and building of futures, resisting external perspectives or predetermination. In many contexts, as was shown for the cases of the popular market Quito or the black communities in the United States, these communitarian practices are rooted in the rural past of the people in the cities. As they moved to urban spaces, they brought along some of their former communitarian and family ways which allowed building cooperatives in the US, reinventing relationships of reciprocity in the Quito market, and creating ways of mutual support and collective care to sustain their lives and communities in both.

At the same time, communitarian logics are very diverse: other movements like the LGBTIQ and women's movements might not permanently occupy specific physical territories, but they have appropriated and built reference points, circuits, proper spaces and communities of support in cities around the world. Their demands, performative practices and the networks of daily solidarities they weave, become shields against discrimination and violence, at the same allowing their visibility and presence in the urban public space as such. Ecologist or critical arts movements intervene and occupy spaces they do not control, to defend and transform these spaces, or generate public debate or consciousness on their issues. The internet- and virtual-network-based dynamics of popular uprisings like the indignados, #OccupyWallstreet, the Arab uprisings for dignity and many contemporary struggles around the world show how the notion of networks and communities has gotten far more complex in the last decades, in connecting virtual communities with offline territorial interventions.

All of these examples show a complex dialectic in between concrete daily life struggles, the defense of spaces for the common good, and the fight against historical patterns of domination and oppression. These different ways of building communities and communalize urban spaces, establish a direct tension with the property regimes that sustain our societies' status quo. In most contemporary societies –particularly in urban areas- there are three forms of hegemonic property: individual, state and private property. Afro-american urban populations, markets in India and Ecuador, and Brazilian and Nigerian urban resistances built through their practices alternative ways of governing territories in a common way, which are not considered by those property regimes.

The emphasis on self-determination, the transformation of patterns of domination, and the subversion of existing economic processes and property regimes make that our vision of radical urban transformation go beyond the discourses on the rights to the

city, to water or housing, as well, as the project of transition towns or circular economies. Although, all of these rights are fundamental -and we support the struggles seeking their recognition- and we consider that energy transition and the building of circular economies are indispensable, we consider that none of these ambitions can be realized without systemic transformation.

Complex issues that came up in our discussion on the control over space are violence and disputes over territories related to illegal activities, particularly drug trafficking. On the one hand, structural impoverishment and exclusion are the main cause of illegal activities, leaving little choices especially to young men who face structural racism and discrimination, which then integrate street organizations related to drug trafficking or other illegal activities. Also, under the pretext of a war on drugs, widespread violence has been unleashed upon impoverished neighborhoods, targeting particularly non-white young men. The war on drugs lay the grounds for the criminalization of poverty, by imposing a brutal security regime on marginalized neighborhoods that causes mass incarceration, killings by State security forces and widespread abuse of public power. The most dramatic cases, like the Philippines, Brazil and Mexico, reflect a wider worldwide tendency. However, it is also true that criminal street organizations are one of the main challenges to the construction of alternative territories from the grass roots, as they are expanding their control over territories and populations in many parts of the world, imposing a regime of often extreme violence and capital accumulation upon them, which also -and sometimes particularly- affect grass roots organizers and social leaders.

Several, complex questions emerge from this: how do we understand the legal, illegal, paralegal and underground practices in a context in which the law structurally underpins or even produces extreme social inequality, and is rooted in institutionalized racism? To what extent and in what ways can grass roots organizing offer a valid alternative to criminal street organizations, and how can it avoid ending up as target of their activities itself? In what ways can grass roots movements offer protection against the criminalization of poverty, and extremely violent security policies against popular neighborhoods? And: in what ways do such alternative communities effectively contribute to the transformation of the structural conditions that force young people into criminal activities?

4. Building communitarian economies

The building of alternative territories requires the generation of alternative economies rooted in the spaces which people reclaim. Thinking alternative economic practices requires a complex and precise understanding of the logics underlying the current economic system.

A first dimension of reality, has to do with the progressive privatization and mercantilization of spaces and social relations in our cities. Cities are the arenas of speculative practices with real estate properties, housing and “urban development”; of the privatization of crucial public services like water, transportation, education and healthcare; of the promotion of consumption through massive advertising, etc. Common spaces like popular markets, cultural, social or youth centers etc. are under pressure, and often replaced by commodified spaces.

Secondly, the processes of capitalist expansion should be seen as a complex and multifaceted process that adapts to different realities. Capitalist accumulation has always relied on the appropriation of unpaid and devaluated care- and reproduction work, as well as of the appropriation of nature, in order to maximize profit and guarantee processes of growth and expansion. So, capitalist processes actually root privatization and commodification, in the decomodifying of other practices. This implies our discussion on decomodification should analyses in each situation what practices, relations and things are commodified and decomodified at the same time.

A third crucial which, according to our discussion, has to be taken into account for the building of alternative economies, is the double challenge posed by actual constant impoverishment and the dominant discourses around poverty and its eradication.

On the one hand, obviously processes of dispossession and expansive appropriation constantly produce inequality and impoverishment, which forces many people to dedicate a big share of their lifetime to ensure their survival, dealing with material needs, constant insecurity, anxiety and fear due to their precarious living conditions. Thus poverty is actively produced as the counterpart of accumulation and concentration of wealth, following and reasserting the lines of class exploitation, but also of the racial and patriarchal divisions of labor rooted in the colonial past and its present continuities. Therefore, poverty can also be seen as a regime of control over large parts of world population, as it shapes the aspirations of millions of peoples around the globe which seek access to other levels of security, of consumption and in general life opportunities for themselves or their children.

On the other side, the ways in which poverty have been framed discursively by the dominant development institutions reduces human needs mainly to the needs of capitalist markets. The most common poverty indicators are centered on money, income and consumption, thereby making affective, relational, cultural and spiritual needs invisible. Accordingly, poverty eradication policies often promote features like competitiveness, individual entrepreneurship and property, the search for profit and access to international markets, which are diametrically opposed to the values needed for the construction of alternative economies. Instead, mainstream top-down poverty eradication programs often reduce the capacities for self-organization and self-reliance to resolve social, economic and political challenges by focusing on income and consumption.

Consequently, both alternative economic imaginaries and narratives, and alternative practices of production, distribution and consumption are necessary to overcome the privatized and commodified city, by building ways of living well that connect social and economic justice, with access to social relations, community embedding and cultural belonging.

Our general vision on building alternative urban economies is based on the combination of democratization and the decommodification of the economy, by bringing it under communitarian or common control. Instead of enshrining the generation of profit and economic growth as the main organizing principle of social relations and institutions -as was identified as the essence of the “Great Transformation” to modern capitalism described by the austro-hungarian economic historian Karl Polanyi-, we pose that the economy needs to be embedded in social and cultural relations and must serve the sustainability of life in all its dimensions.

The starting point of such a narrative and logic of embedded economies, is the rupture with the logics of extractivism, expropriation, accumulation by dispossession and externalization of costs and impacts that sustain contemporary urban centers, and the regimes of privatization and neoliberalism that govern them. At the same time, our group is aware of the historical limitations of State control over the economy, which has led in many cases to corruption, inefficiency and authoritarianism.

Therefore, it seems crucial to overcome the public/private divide as principal, and unique ways of organizing the economy, and society in general. The notion of the commons -but also of community-based economies and politics around the globe-, as an alternative type of social, economic and political relations, responds to this challenge. The commons is a historic construct of hundreds of years of struggle, an contemporary vision present in struggles against privatization and neoliberalization, but also a theoretical/political position of reclaiming the goods that belong to everybody under community rules/norms.

As a group, we collectively understand the usefulness of thinking of processes of building local and people’s power to defend our dignity and existence by regaining control over our economies and politics, which the commons evoke. At the same time, we are very aware that the term commons is an Anglo-Saxon concept that is not easy to translate to other languages, even when in these other cultures communitarian practices of de-commodification do exist and have always existed. Sometimes, de-commodified practices are suddenly “discovered” or “labeled” by academics and activists, whilst they have organized communitarian and individual life for ages.

Conscious of this possible eurocentricity, and being aware of the diverse positions towards the concept within our own group, we therefore used the notion of the commons as an instrument to provoke an open debate, more than as a narrow political grammar to frame our discussion. This was particularly relevant in Barcelona, where we had seen during the week how the notion of the commons inspired local activism and politics to imagine other ways of organizing the city, its politics and economies. The discussion, allowed us to define elements of a general vision on alternative economies, we shared as a group.

Alternative economies...

... are sustained by people’s ability to control and direct the economy for the common good. Democratic processes should decide on economic priorities and policies;

... favor relationship building over capital accumulation, as the example of the community currencies show. Although they provide an alternative way of accessing capital, their success might depend even more so on the creation of dynamics and relations of solidarity, interchange, risk sharing and mutual support, which strengthen community’s power in general;

... require alternative values. The Quito market example shows the importance of promoting use value over exchange value, which allows incorporating solidarity, intercultural dialogue and the weaving of social relations in the market dynamic, as it is not – only/principally- focused on profit maximization;

... imply the necessity of sharing: access to work, resources and benefits, and responsibility for the consequences of our activities;

... need to value and incorporate care work in its models and cost-benefit analysis, so that care work is recognized and paid for;

... need to value and internalize environmental impact, to progressively reduce the damages caused by humanity to nature;

... require environmental justice and consciousness to transform the root causes of ecological destruction that are concentrated in our cities;

... favor local links and networks of production, distribution and consumption over global capital flows, by deglobalizing supply chains and localizing our economies, to reduce their environmental impact, and strengthen interchange and solidarity on local and regional levels;

... redistribute wealth, but also limit levels of consumption in search of a balance between our societies impact and the limits posed by nature;

... require different legal frameworks for property, as well as a different grammar, that will allow the institutionalization of the commons;

... provokes thinking of creating new metrics for measurement of economic success. This, however, might be big challenge, as it is not easy to think of indicators for wellbeing, as universal indicators would violate the idea of embedded notions and proofs of living well. So indicators might be more on processes and ways of creating accountability;

... are rooted in alternative knowledges, so that we need to extent our critique to development, to the processes of knowledge production. Local knowledge (experts) should be the center of our knowledge production / legal creativity.

These principles for an alternative economy provide orientation for a model that also needs to guarantee access to work, certain

levels of consumption and access to goods, etc. Therefore, it is important to see that alternative practices of embedded economies and the commons exist many times in complex and incomplete ways, constituting hybrid spaces and processes that are simultaneously (partially) against the market, but also relating to its practices. Community currencies or practices of interchange for example do not eliminate the use of money completely, but built alternative practices and spaces that complement and articulate “normal” currencies.

Therefore, alternative economies at the same time, imply processes of transition of the current economic model to deep alternatives, as well, as creating an ecosystem of different, articulated and coexistent economic logics. Solidarity economies and cooperativism need to have a central place in this web of economic relations, enabled by common decisions making and public policies that transforms and impede the current dominance of large scale and transnational economic processes. As, commodities will be around, progressive disconnecting from global value chains is necessary to protect territories or communities against external damaging market dynamics.

In these processes of transition and the building of alternative economies, consumers play a crucial role. Their daily choices will define if local markets and grocery stores, short value chains, organic food and fair trade products have a chance to compete with global value chains and shopping malls. Therefore the building of consciousness and direct relations between consumers and producers crucial for the building of alternatives.

The Quito example shows in practice how this can work: as transnational companies are less present in the Ecuador, production and commercialization are still pretty much in hands of national groups, and people themselves. This allows markets to maintain a central place in local societies, for commercialization of products, but also for relations, intercultural dynamics and bonding through the market. However, to defend this common sphere of the market, other economic networks or weavings bringing markets together, and then connecting them more with rural collectives, are necessary.

5. Transforming rural-urban dynamics

Alternative urban economies depend on the transformation of the relationships between cities and the countryside. Urbanization, can be seen as a process of loss of sovereignty of self-relying or self-sustaining rural communities, who have been destroyed by the expansion of cities, marginalized and incorporated in dependent relations with the urban metabolisms, and/or penetrated by capital focused on creating new markets. It is also, a process of destruction and domination of the environment, by transforming nature in resources and disciplined spaces to allow urban growth.

Once again, this issue requires confronting the real exploitative relations between cities and the countryside, and subverting dichotomist discourses that portray urban and rural spheres as opposite an radically separated realities, with wealth, opportunities and power located in the cities, whilst the countryside's importance is based on its capacity to provide resources to metropolitan areas and absorb its externalities.

Our discussion insisted that in the contemporary world distinctions between urban and rural areas have blurred, giving space for a “rurban” reality in which rurality and urbanity are connected, mixed and transformed continuously. These new rurality's and rurban cities offer opportunities to overcome the historical exploitation of the countryside, and strengthen the fundamental connections and dialogues between urban and rural areas.

This implies, promoting and visibilizing rurality in urban spaces, by opening spaces and supporting practices of agricultural production and communitarian organization within the cities, as are present in the afro-american cooperatives, Brazilian and Nigerian urban resistances, and even in the search for food security in the context of the Syrian war.

Secondly, assuring safe and visible spaces for those who provide services and goods to the cities promote the valorization of rural spaces within the city, following the ancestral traditions of, for example, pre-Colombian American cities where prominent spaces were provided to agricultural producers to facilitate their connection in the cities.

A third strategy, is based on building alliances and connections between the countryside and cities, as we can see in the examples of the markets in Ecuador and India. The creation of organizational bonds between rural producers and urban vendors in order to develop a common agenda, or political agendas on issues like environmental health and access to water, allow to build such bridges.

The transformation of urban-rural relationships requires the (re)dignifying life in the countryside, breaking with notions of backwardness and modernity attached to rural and urban, respectively. As capitalism lays on invisibility -we don't know where our water comes from-, it is crucial to promote the visibility and comprehension of the urban metabolism and the exploitative relationship with the countryside, to allow mindful practices towards energy, food and water.

The general strategy is about decentering the city from our narratives of wellbeing, and effectively decentralizing economic and political processes, in ways that promote rural access to powerrelations and resources, allowing retention of wealth on a local level. Counter policies to enable these processes of decentralization, as well as grass roots initiatives to build them from below -for example, energy cooperatives-, are indispensable. On this topic, Germany is an excellent example, as national policies and investments really favored the decentralization of industries and commerce.

6. Taking the power back: radical democracy, counterpolicies and transformative

governance

A crucial issue is on what kind of political regimes can foster urban alternatives in the short and long terms. In our meeting in Quito we acknowledged that for the deep structural change our societies need to overcome the civilizational crisis, the current State is poorly equipped and should probably be progressively subverted, transformed and abolished. However, currently the State, is a reality in our contemporary societies, and should therefore always be considered in our political strategies.

A serious evaluation of the emancipatory potential of the State, should start by recognizing that the State is a complex landscape of interrelated institutions (local, provincial or departmental and national level, executive, legislative and judicial, authorities, public health and education systems, State-owned companies, and other State bodies). Historically, the State has been built through the articulation of different power regimes and regulatory practices of society, territories and populations in a growingly coherent administrative apparatus.

In the world of globalization it would appear capital is debilitating the State, but at the same time the State is being used by capital for its interests. Local elites integrate the State structures in their power structures, and transnational companies and national elites capture the State to guarantee and promote their investments. So a first question is, to what extent the State can help to build an enabling environment for practices of urban alternatives, especially when faced enemies are so strong. A second more strategic question, would be, what alternative ways of institutionalization beyond state policies can sustain radical urban transformation.

In our Quito meeting we saw that State institutions and representatives can play important roles in support of –particularly defensive– social struggles. Nevertheless, the challenge of sustainability and expansion of alternative practices through their institutionalization and stabilization, brings us back to the contradictory nature of the State's capacity of promoting changes through public policies. As one of the main objectives and functions of the State is ensuring stable conditions for capital accumulation, it is no surprise many times alternative practices created by social movements, were co-opted and depoliticized through state institutionalization. However, it is hard to envision short term transitions of urban metabolism happening, without enabling regulatory environments, or without considering the huge impact on society of public investments and procurement that can either enable or dismantle transformation, sovereignty and communalization.

In general, we feel that active (counter-)policies designed to simultaneously enable solutions to the problems faced by urban populations, as well as transform the State institutions by giving power back to organized communities and to decenter the State, open a more constructive discussion on a different politics towards the State based on the notion of the commons as an alternative to public governance. Such counter-policies can be envisioned on urban planning, public transport environmental and other issues, implemented through common institutions that may be integrated in political processes, without becoming dependent on State institutions. The Barcelona case represents an excellent example of the attempt to transform the local State through the occupation and subversion of existing institutions, through the building of commons, and the implementation of transformatory regulatory frameworks, but also through using local policies to limit privatization, financierization and speculation.

A second debate took place on the notions of democracy and self-determination, considering the birth of the concept of democracy in the Greek notion of the people ruling themselves. In the contemporary globalized world, we tend to talk about democracy in two different ways: liberal representative democracy that can be exported around the world, or radical democracy that implies people self-governing themselves through a variety of institutions and practices. Liberal representative democracy limits self-rule of the people to elections and referendums, whilst economic processes are left to the principles and institutions of the free market. On top of this economic actors, elites and institutions increasingly penetrate and condition democratic political processes through lobbying, media coverage, campaign financing and corruption. Although, complementarity between representative and radical democratic practices and institutions might be possible, people cannot rule themselves if democratic rule is not rooted in social justice and economic democracy as well.

Our case studies show different potentials and limitations of building self-determination and radical democracy on the one hand, and in dealing with the State on the other. Brazilian, Afro-american and Nigerian urban communities demand recognition, public services, and enabling local policies in support of their plans and causes. Their organizations and leaders have either participated, or maintained close relationships with progressive political parties, with mixed results. Also, Quito market, and Kenyan alternative currencies demand protection and support from local authorities to allow the continuity of their embedded economies and communitarian practices. At the same time, in each of these cases, alternative political institutions are being built through the practices of self-organization, as State institutions can not satisfy, nor fully recognize, the emancipatory potential and horizons of each of these experiences.

Our debates also surfaced the complex nature of self-determination, as communities can also invisibilize exploitative practices, and people many times lack information and experience to take decisions. Therefore, we need to go further into the idea of not romanticizing, and analyze inequalities, both traditional ones (caste, class, race, patriarchy, ...), as new ones (new class relations, ...). Within our communities there are also people very interested in getting coopted, for example Dalit members finding a Chamber of Commerce, Black American artists diffusing capitalist practices and imaginaries.

All of this implies, the importance of processes of building communities, territories and self-determination, in an autonomous and relational way, based on other notions and cultures of power. The creation of new political cultures through social movement

processes is therefore imperative for the existence of radical democracy. In many cities around the world, in the last years, women's, feminist and LGBTQX struggles have been among the most massive and visible ones, addressing concrete issues of violence and discrimination, but simultaneously resisting against authoritarian and conservative imaginaries and political power. Other social movement struggles, like anti-racist, youth, environmentalist and animal rights movements also push for a cultural shift. Their practices not only demand change in the status quo, but also call for individual mindfulness and change, and internal debates within movements and left wing political organizations on their ways of reproducing inequality, oppression and the destruction of nature.

So the –many times contentious and complex- dialogues and meetings between these movements on a general level, as well as in territorialized struggles, opens the opportunity of weaving relational autonomies with the capacity to democratize our societies. The notion of policentricity, in addition of consensus building, is very important, as decision making many times occurs in several sites simultaneously – so we need to analyze how these nodes are related. Another crucial challenge, again has to do, with how to relate virtual space and political processes, with material political practices. All of this is producing new political cultures and practices that are still emerging in coexistence with traditional politics.

7. Making the road by walking: Final thoughts on strategies and tactics

The Barcelona meeting of our group was an exploration of alternative practices and political horizons for radical urban transformation. Our discussions, once again, showed capitalism as a monster of many heads –a hydra, as the Zapatistas in Mexico said-, that presents itself in every site in different ways. So we need a diverse strategy as well, with demands smarter than capital. Strategy needs to be aware of the temporal challenges we face: time is running out for the kind of radical change our society needs, but at the same time conditions for radical change are limited.

Therefore, struggles for alternatives and transformative politics require doing tradeoffs, in the tactical politics within deeper strategic struggles. Sometimes in the short term we can loose on important issues, whilst still making progress towards long run goals. At the same time, this obliges us to be very aware of the future. The ecological crisis will cause a fundamental re-shaping of geographies, and impact directly on urban life as well, through water and human health crisis, “natural” disasters and climate refugee migration. People are going to be moved back to some rural spaces, as at some point people have to leave the cities because they are not sustainable places. And environmental consciousness will probably grow enormously as the consequences of ecological crisis unfold.

Therefore, as seen in Quito, societal transformation requires a combination of short term strategies to limit and fight social-ecological destruction, the generation and defense of prefigurative alternative practices that envision a radically different society, and the building of long term social movement strategies for structural change. In the short term, radical social struggles in defense of common spaces and interests are necessary to stop speculation, financierization and privatization, and to resist against the regimes of violence and criminalization imposed on impoverished and racialized populations. The design and implementation of counterpolicies at different scales, by decentralizing economic policies, can promote redistribution policies, sustainable livelihoods and ecological transition, where possible with State support, but also through grass roots institutions and autonomous practices.

As extreme inequality in contemporary urban contexts is rooted in racism, colonialism and patriarchy, strong intersectional narratives and strategies are crucial for real social transformation. Without the control of material conditions to produce dignity and democratize economies through cooperativism and communitarian economic practices urban alternatives will not be viable. Simultaneously, political horizons of what means living well in the cities need to destabilize notions of poverty, progress, and individualism that sustain the imperial mode of living, by building alternative imaginaries that allow communing and democratization of contemporary cities, and will also limit and reduce mass consumption.

In a context of reactionary and violent counteroffensives against the progress of emancipatory struggles, public discourse and (political) culture is a strategic battleground, where particularly women's and feminist movements are involved in a fierce struggle on the future. These struggles are about the defense of democracy and emancipation, as well as about the building of new cultures of social movement and emancipatory struggles.

The push for environmental justice and ecological transition is crucial on all levels (energy production, pollution, consumption patterns, etc.) as urban metabolisms concentrate root causes for the ecological crisis in the world. Although, transition will definitely include and require technological innovation, only real systemic change will allow to avoid ecological collapse. Such change implies the transformation of urban-rural dynamics that overcome dichotomist binaries, which integrates the countryside as resource provider in urban metabolism. A different future, requires more rurality in urban areas through agroecology, permaculture and food sovereignty initiatives, as well as communitarian and intercultural social spaces, as well as a dignified countryside where people live well, and harmony with nature is preserved.

All of this can only be built upon a solid basis of political organizing and social movement building, which require building bridges between movements and struggles, and particularly by maximizing alliances in between urban and rural organizations. Issues like food, water and environmental health seem to have potential for deepening alliances. Alliances between more middle class movements of activists, consumers, etc. and popular struggles is fundamental.

Based on the third meeting of the Global Working Group Beyond Development, elaborated by Raphael Hoetmer
