3. Powers and terrains of ambiguity in the field of urban self-organization today

Self-organization processes/community based initiatives have always been part of the city's construction, of the 'collaborative city making' discussed above. They are by definition **ambiguous** situations where different subjects, with different intentions and interests, interact and can also conflict among them. This gets even more complicated in a condition where the role of **institutions is changing** (up to the modern state) and with socio-economic dynamics that are impacting on the welfare state. The radical change in the State organization and policy making involve a backwardness of the *welfare state* and an ambiguous support to neoliberal dynamics. In this process, the self-organization process is at risk to become a beneficial factor to such a retreat as it tends to control social conflict.

Starting from this state of the art, the session should discuss the main tropics of ambiguity.

The relation between:

- **Self-organization, activation Vs institutions**

Public institutions in Europe are increasingly challenged to find new ways to provide public value in an open, transparent way. In a growing number of small and large cities across Europe, citizens are engaged and mobilized to demonstrate their ability in creating innovative solutions for important social issues. In many cases, also presented in this session and the following roundtable, we can witness how local institutions change their governance frameworks as well as functioning (i.e. Regolamento Beni Comuni or usi civici in Italy, Patrimonio ciudadano de gestión y uso comunitario in Spain) being confronted with community based initiatives and with the impact of the welfare state constraints in the provision of urban services.
Agents involved in processes of self-organization can create important spaces of autonomy within these dynamics, but in many cases we witness the existence of a relation between self- organized initiatives and institutional actor. We can witness, in some cases, different processes of institutional learning in the governance process as well as political activation in the local societies.
We could focus our discussion on some relevant dichotomies/ambiguity:
   - Are these processes responding to social needs of are supporting the commodification of them?
   - Are they creating new political communities or reducing social conflict?
   - Are they producing new and innovative institutions or just making bad institutions more accountable?
   - Can we witness a learning process both at institutional level and at community based level?

- **Inclusion/exclusion dynamics**

Citizen-driven innovation increases the possibilities for a broader range of people to become directly involved in all stages of social action, but social and spatial barriers are strongly preventing community participation of most vulnerable groups, particularly in those contexts affected by socio-economic and ethnic differences. We want to investigate whether and how such processes are helping to create unprecedented forms of social inclusion, especially in increasingly diverse cities, or if they are creating benefits for closed communities in a general backwardness of public accountability. As well, we want to clarify which kind of "culture of public" such experiences support. We would like to look into the inclusion/exclusion dynamics, focusing on the elements that can promote more inclusive strategies of co-creation.
We could focus our discussion on some relevant dichotomies/ambiguity:
   - Are self-organization processes elitist initiatives that cannot produce benefits to a wider range of user communities and stakeholders?
   - Are self-organization processes able to intervene on increasing socio-spatial inequalities?

- Which strategies can be used to positively intervene in the inclusion/exclusion paradox?

- **Politics**

In the face of the crisis of politics, both as a mediating ability between social needs and the places of decision and as the ability to think about the future and therefore in terms of political culture, self-organization experiences are often a political (and of political culture) laboratory. They are often characterized by their own political proposal, even in conflict with existing social models and dominant ideas of city. Indeed, the political dimension often becomes discriminatory with respect to the evaluation of such experiences.
    - Do they produce new politics and new policies? Do they contribute to the production of political culture?
    - What are the values? On what idea of city and cohabitation are they founded?

- **Bridge the gap between research and urban policies/practices**

Given this backdrop, is probably necessary to refine or redefine the interpretative tools we are using and elaborate at the same time specific research methodologies. We should also discuss about the role of the research in this processes.
    - Is the research a political activation itself? What is the very meaning of action-research in these processes?
    - Which kind of new/innovation methodologies are arousing?
    - How the role of the planners and planning itself is changing confronting with community based initiatives?