Original Article

Open-ended urbanisms: Space-making processes in the protest encampment of the Indignados movement in Barcelona

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Abstract This article studies the spontaneous and organic processes involved in the physical planning of protest encampments. Drawing from ethnographic work in the context of the Indignados Movement in Barcelona, it analyzes the spatial evolution and transformation of the Plaza Catalunya encampment in 2011. The encampments evolved in parallel to the conversations and questions that originated them online and off-line. Thus, it particularly examines the notions of open planning (that is, open-source and open-ended decision-making processes) and urban laboratories that the fieldwork indicates were tested in the space of the encampment. The objective is to understand how urban space can be planned through non-hierarchical space-making processes and without a homogeneous overarching structure. This article situates in a larger discussion about alternative space-making processes such as insurgent, tactical planning, as well as in the recent conversations about open-source cities.


Keywords: public space; insurgent planning; protest encampments; social movements; open-source cities; urban design

Introduction

When the author first presented his work on the protest encampments at a planning conference in 2012, there was a recurrent question from the audience: Where was the planning in all this? The case presented was the 6-week occupation of Plaza Catalunya in Barcelona. During that period, the encampment hosted debate sessions, stencil workshops, impromptu music performances, poetry readings, film screenings, puppet theater shows, an open library, a communal garden, a kitchen that fed thousands twice a day and a daily open-to-the-public general assembly. The protesters used bicycle generators to power the assembly’s sound system, cooked with solar-energy stoves of their own invention and designed clever structures with recycled wooden skids. In this scenario, it was difficult to identify a hierarchical organization, an overarching spatial structure and even harder to pinpoint the planners of that event, but it was impossible not to recognize planning. Nevertheless, the processes involved in the making of the encampments do not fall into the category of normative planning. The conception of space and time, the notion of objectives and the role of institutional planners in space-making processes were directly challenged in the encampment. The space was shaped by organic and spontaneous processes that embraced and capitalized on the collaborative and open character of the encampment. The encampments enacted alternative spatial orders at the local level that at the same time contested power structures at the global level. They operated at two different spatial scales. They have been widely studied as symbolic spaces of political contestation at the large scale in literature coming from geography, philosophy and social sciences (Castells and Hernandez, 2012; Chomsky, 2012; Hardt and Negri, 2012; Harvey, 2012; Sitrin and Azellini, 2012; Zizek, 2012; Purcell, 2013), as
well as from social movement studies (Taylor and Gessen, 2011; Halvorsen, 2012; Pickerill and Krinsky, 2012; Schein, 2012), but there is relatively little work about how the spaces of the encampments were physically planned from the perspective of their own protest planners and the mechanisms tested in this process.

This article draws from ethnographic fieldwork in the context of Indignados mobilizations in Barcelona, to examine the processes, interactions, as well as material and information flows involved in the planning of the encampment of Plaza Catalunya. Through the analysis of the evolution of the representation of encampment and its actual physical space, and of three commissions that participated in the occupation (that is, the commissions of Infrastructures, Kitchen and Garden), this article seeks to tease out the material-spatial practices, criteria and mechanisms that implicitly guided the planning of the encampment.

These mechanisms were defined by an undeclared commitment to openness. Potentially anyone was allowed to participate in the movement and in the construction of the encampment. Thus, the encampment worked as a scaled-down version of the movement at large. The space of the plaza worked similar to an open-source, open-ended system (as referred to in Informatics). Consequently, the spatial structure of the encampment constantly transformed and grew in size and complexity – thus posing ever-greater planning challenges. The encampments were urban laboratories for the ‘analogue’ display of open-source approaches in urban planning. The ultimate objective of this work is to understand the implications of collaborative, spontaneous and organic mechanisms in planning and urban design processes. It is an outstanding opportunity to explore how public spaces are socially, culturally and politically constructed through alternative planning processes without the presence or influence of professional planners.

The next section is a review of the literature that informs the physical planning processes of the encampment. The third section is a description of the methodological approach and units of analysis that were used in the fieldwork undertaken in Barcelona. The fourth section is the core of the article and is divided into two parts – the analysis of the spatial evolution of the encampment and the analysis of the three working commissions that dealt with the de facto planning of the encampment. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion about the notions of urban laboratories and open planning, as potential contributions to planning and design processes.

### Insurgent Spaces and Open-Source Systems

The study of the planning processes in the encampments brings together two bodies of literature that rarely share the same spaces of debate – the work on insurgent spaces and that on open-source urban systems. The former describes how urban space can be socially and materially constructed as a result of informal urban processes. The latter describes how an urban system, similar to an information system, can be constructed as the result of the flow of continuous external inputs and remain subject to transformation – or ‘editable’. What they have in common, as we will see throughout this article, is the fact that they both operate through organic, spontaneous and non-hierarchical social and material processes.

In the last 15 years, there has been a growing interest in alternative and non-institutional urban processes, like the ones shaping the encampments of 2011, as increasingly important planning and space-making agents. From the notion of tactical urbanism to insurgent planning, discussions in the recent literature have focused on the potential of the organic and spontaneous nature of urban space to inform alternative forms of city-making. A seminal text on the issue is perhaps Holston’s (1999) *Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship*, which describes the incapacity of normative and positivistic planning and design to read the sociopolitical flows that escape institutional scopes. The notion of insurgent spaces has been influential in planning, urban design and urban theory (Irazábal, 2008; Miraftab, 2009; Hou, 2010; Friedmann, 2011). Similarly, other authors have focused on the potential of alternative space-making processes as loose space (Franck and Stevens, 2007), ludic space (Stevens, 2007), everyday urbanism (Crawford et al, 2005) and unknown space (Borden, 2001).

Bey (2003) introduces the importance of time in the construction of autonomous spaces and Ward (2000) writes about the role of direct action and the tactical potential of squatting, community gardening and other forms of spontaneous organization. The notions of bricolage and collage strategies have also been influential in architecture and urban
design (Rowe and Koetter, 1978). Recent planning literature also shows interest in the importance of autonomous organization and social movements as planning factors (Chatterton, 2005; De, 2006). Specific literature about encampments also focuses on their self-regulation potential (Niman, 2011) and on how they grow out of a desire to establish spaces of autonomy and opposition to external control (Hailey, 2009).

In recent publications, architects, planners and urban designers analyze protest encampments through their material outcomes (Allen et al, 2013) and describe how their fragile and ephemeral character (Rice, 2013) and their adoption of vernacular construction techniques (Taylor, 2014) reflect the plasticity of this emergent society, while revealing the political importance of occupying space (that is, with light architecture). In Beyond Zuccotti Park (Shiffman et al, 2012), architects debate the notion of the public and the commons in the light of examples from various Occupy Movements and examine the role of professional designers as agents for social change. It is also worth mentioning out that the European Prize of Urban Public Space of 2012 was symbolically awarded to the Encampment of Puerta del Sol in Madrid, which was described as an ephemeral installation with the quality of being a participatory and collaborative space (Public Space, 2012). The prize was not actually awarded to anyone in particular, as the encampment was collectively built by all its participants, but it shows the interest in and recognition of the planning experiments that were tested in the plazas.

The encampments were also influenced by open systems approaches, which were adopted from the Internet culture, social networks and the esthetics of Informatics prominent in these movements (Castells and Hernandez, 2012; Fuster Morell, 2012). They have also been described as offline versions of their counterparts in the Internet sphere (De la Llata, 2014) and as the result of the open-source hipercity (Massey and Snyder, 2012). The encampments have also been described as ‘media-spaces’ in which there is there is a ‘continuous feedback between physical public space and the media’ (Marom, 2013). Both online and off-line relationships define how the space and the movements are organized (Juris, 2012, p. 260).

Nevertheless, the literature about open-source urban systems and planning is rather incipient with recent online publications noting the possibilities of open-source and ‘wiki’ approaches for urban planning and design (Polis, 2010; Coren, 2011; Merchant, 2011; Niaros, 2012; Tato and Vallejo, 2012; Open Source Cities). There are also projects and theories that seek to incorporate these approaches into planning and design, such as The Open Planning Project, The Open Architecture Network, the Peer-2-Peer Lab (Niaros, 2012) and MIT’s Urban Network Analysis software. They focus on the potential of open-source to simplify participatory planning and make it more accessible. However, the possibility of ‘wiki-planning’ poses a number of challenges. A wiki urban space would not only be an open-source, but also an open-ended system. As the system remains open for external inputs, the space constantly grows in complexity. Normative planning traditionally stops the inputs of participation at a certain time, in order to give space for implementation. The encampments tested both insurgent space-making and open-source processes in situ and in real time. They did not only use them virtually or symbolically, but directly in space. The following empirical work examines how these approaches were tested in the making of the encampments in order to draw lessons for planning and urban design.

A Diffuse Object of Study (Methodological Approach)

Recent social movements, such as the Indignados, have been described as movements of movements (Mertes and Bello, 2004), non-movements (Bayat, 2010) and social mobilizations (Rebelos.net, 2012), as they have open and aggregative identities – and the encampments were where this condition manifested most evidently. The space was permeable to external informational, organizational and material flows, so that processes from outside penetrated the realm of the encampment and their networks expanded beyond the space of the plaza. Therefore, the encampment is best understood as a diffuse object of study, with a mixed-methods ethnography being the best way to approach it. An ethnography explores a socio-cultural (and spatial) phenomena from the perspective of the subject(s) of study. The material is presented using Emerson et al (2011) method for ethnographic fieldwork analysis: (i) an analytic point is posed, (ii) orienting information sets the context, (iii) an excerpt of the interview or observation is transcribed and (iv) it is followed by an analytic comment. The units of analysis are the locales of the commissions, agoras and assemblies, which were built with light structures, such as tarps, canvases, ropes, wooden skids, web-like pergolas,
boards and plastic furniture during the encampments of May 2011, November 2011 and the 4-day anniversary encampment of May 2012.

The ethnography was divided into two sections: (i) the observation of the evolving material outcomes taking place in the plaza, with the objective of identifying spatial patterns and (ii) the exploration of the decision-making processes that were used to produce those outcomes, with the objective of identifying what criteria of regulation were used to plan the encampment. For the former, the data collection and analysis was based on the direct observation of the space during the period of occupation and the review of video-photographic records, and graphic representations of the event produced by the author and the movement itself in order to map the planning patterns involved in the development of the encampment. The latter was based on participatory observation in public assemblies and protest actions, and interviews with protesters in order to understand their decision-making criteria.

The objective was to tease out lessons for planning and design processes from the decision-making criteria vis-à-vis the space-making patterns tested in the encampment. However, the diffuse nature of the phenomenon and the aggregative identity of the movement posed certain limitations. As we will see in the following sections, the group became progressively more populated and more (sub)commissions appeared, and consequently the locales split into smaller ones and it was difficult to track the original plans for the space. The movement adapted their plans to the circumstances and the space, and therefore the methods of analysis and research proposal had to be readapted in response to that every time. This represented a huge methodological challenge as the object of study was constantly growing and changing, but it also lead to its reframing as an open-ended space/urbanism, which is the topic of the article.

**Spatial Maieutics: The Space as a Question in the Barcelona Protest Encampment**

**The evolution of the encampment: Turning voices into spaces**

The Barcelona encampment started without a specific spatial plan. A group of about 150 people went to Plaza Catalunya motivated by a declared sense of indignation (hence the name Indignados movement). Two weeks later, around 12,000 people were participating in the encampment, according to local police (Mondelo, 2011). The motivations for the encampment included the foreclosure crisis, the privatization of public health and education systems, labor reforms that resulted in the reduction of worker’s rights, among other causes. The majority of the people initially went to the plaza with a non-specific feeling of refusal about the general order of things. They approached the plaza with more questions than answers, and often said to the press that they still did not have grievances and demands that could be made public. Instead, they invited people to join the debates at the assemblies to ‘find out together’ what the occupation was about. They also said they did not know how long they were planning to stay in the plazas. The encampment developed with a great sense of uncertainty, but also of possibility. People gathered around conversations, performances, protest actions and debate sessions, which would later develop into thematic commissions. The discussions about the overarching principles and the spirit of the movement turned into thematic ‘agoras’, as they called them. These were spaces of debate and conversation and were not thematically specific like the commissions that later resulted from them (for example, the commissions on environment, economics, media, housing, health, education and so on) but deliberately diffuse in their objectives—a question was posed and the participants had debates around it. Similarly, the spaces of the agoras were not physically delimited, but only located vaguely as gathering places in the elliptic granite esplanade in the center of the plaza and, as the general assembly, they were open to anyone who wanted to join the public debate.

The agoras were named after three struggles that were considered inspirational to the movement: (i) Iceland, in honor of the protests in that country that resulted in a democratic revolution and the incarceration of the bankers and ministers who created the economic crisis, (ii) Palestine, in honor of the endurance of the Palestinian resistance and (iii) Tahrir, in honor of the occupation of that square that became an emblem of the Egyptian Revolution. The agoras gathered in the granite esplanade to have conversations about the three inspirational causes and their relation to the current movement, while the commissions were physically established with stands made with wooden boards, light furniture, canvas canopies and web-like pergolas in the perimeter of the
esplanade. The outcomes of the debates at the three agoras in the early days of the 15 M are more difficult to track than the ones at the commissions, most of which produced minutes for each session. Perhaps they are only discernable in the performance of the movement at large (See Figure 1).

Every day, after the conversations and debates in the agoras and commissions finished in the afternoon, these were summarized in the form of proposals that were presented in the evening general assembly also taking place at the esplanade. At night, this same space was filled with people in sleeping bags. This cycle repeated every day, as the encampment grew in population and complexity throughout the duration of the occupation. New commissions and collectives developed from the early conversations at the assemblies and others joined from outside. (see Figure 2).

The different maps that the movement produced throughout the occupation revealed how they evolved from non-identifiable and boundless clusters of conversations to specific working commissions. As the clusters of conversations became more thematically clear, the physical space also reflected this transformation. The first representation of the conversations was published on the encampment Website and Twitter account with hard copies delivered to people in the plaza. The document is not really a map but a diagram of the different conversations and commissions. Later that day, an actual map of the plaza was drawn on a canvas and displayed in the plaza. This map incorporated most of the thematic clusters described in the diagram. The next day the canvas map was digitalized and more commissions were incorporated. For example, the collective ‘Indignant Feminists’ was physically incorporated to the encampment after joining both online and off-line conversations. Finally, a new map was produced after the police tried to evict the encampment on 27 May. Most of the commissions remained in place, but now sub-commissions and associated

Figure 1: The Barcelona encampment.

Notes: The encampment that started on 15 May 2011 (hence the name 15-M Movement) was the continuous occupation of the Plaza Catalunya for about 1 month. The riot police failed to evict the participants 2 weeks after it was established. During that month there were assemblies, workshops, film screenings, music performances, plays and think tanks sessions held in the plaza, until it was voluntarily dismantled.

Source: Fotomovimiento. Picture by Vincenzo Rigogliuso. All sizes of this photograph are available under a license of Creative Commons by Fotomovimiento. 27 May 2011, Barcelona, http://www.flickr.com/photos/63055421@N04/576635812)
Figure 2: Structure of the Barcelona general assembly at the protest encampment in Plaza Catalunya. 
Source: The Author.

Figure 3: Evolution of the Barcelona encampment in May of 2011. 
Notes: The figures show how the space was initially represented as a diagram of the different debates and conversations happening in the plaza (22 May). Later, as the conversations and agoras became more thematically specific they started occupying specific spaces in the plaza (23 May). At the end, they became commissions that established themselves with canvas, wood boards and other forms of light structures (30 May). 
Sources: (from left to right): (i) Image from file Guia informativa acampada Plaça Catalunya 23m, (published on 23 May 2011. (ii) La Nostra Plaça, Picture by Marta Farràs Drago, all sizes of this photograph are available under a license of Creative Commons of Marta Farràs, 22 May 2011. (iii) Image from file Hoja Informativa CASTELLANO, (published on 30 May 2011. (iv) Image from file Organització communal de la Plaça Catalunya (published on 22 May 2011, published at http://materialsdfusio.files.wordpress.com, official material for public broadcasting)
collectives also joined the encampment (follow
text and Figure 3).

These maps and drawings are simplified rep-
resentations of what actually happened in the plaza.
In reality, the commissions, agoras and assemblies
coexisted with performances, happenings, people
sleeping in the plaza and improvised workshops to
paint and print banners to be used in demonstra-
tions. In addition, street vendors and tourists still
visited the plaza for different purposes. At a glance,
the encampment may appear chaotic. Nevertheless,
there was a spontaneous and organic order sus-
tained by collaborative and incremental processes.
This is clear if we look at the 4-day encampment
organized for the anniversary of the movement in
2012, which repeated the planning structure of its
2011 predecessor. Participants established the com-
misions in the plaza in defined and designated
spaces, after a year of working independently in
their specific causes (see Figure 4).

The communication and interactions in the
encampment were not linear, in the sense that it
sought to reach conclusions, but rather reflected a
cyclical process. Participants asked questions that
led to new questions on which others could
elaborate, build upon and explore further. This
process, besides the notion of agora, resembles
another figure of classical Athens: Socrates’
Maieutics. This pedagogical and debate method
consists of posing questions that are then fol-
lowed by other questions, deepening into an
issue every time. This method was also mani-
fested in the space-making processes of the
encampment. As we will see in the following
section, the encampment grew in size and com-
plexity as more people joined the debates and
conversations every day in the agoras and assem-
bles. Thus, every new iterations of the conver-
sations expanded the scope of the existing
commissions, while also becoming new spaces in

**Figure 4: Flyer of the 12–15 May 2012 Barcelona encampment in Plaza Catalunya.**

*Notes: The drawings describe the route of the demonstrations (left) and the spatial distribution of the plaza (circle in the right). The commissions are located in the outer ring of the granite esplanade, leaving the center for debates and the General Assembly. The flyer also marks information modules at the entrances of the plaza (published in http://12m15m.acampadadebarcelona.org/es/388/).
the plaza (see comparative diagram between linear planning and open planning in Figure 5).

The working commissions

To understand how the complexity of the encampment was successfully sustained throughout the occupation, I will analyze three of commissions that continuously participated in the encampment: the commissions of Infrastructures, Kitchen and Garden. The objective is to examine the mechanisms implicit in the planning of the physical space of the encampment. The analysis is based on ethnographic work in the field, as well as Internet and graphic material produced by participants of the movement.

The infrastructures commission. A planning platform

After the first agoras were established in the plaza, a commission called Infrastructures was organized to deal with the physical organization of the plaza. However, they did not actually plan the space of encampment, but only provided other commissions with tools and materials to build their stands and workspaces. The infrastructures commission continued facilitating most of the planning of the encampment until it was dismantled. A participant described the work and objectives of the commission thus:

"The objective of the commission of infrastructures is that the materials that we get from donations or that we collect ourselves is managed for the needs of the commissions. At the same time, if the needs of the commissions can’t be satisfied at a particular moment, we look for resources. If someone needs a table we look for someone who can give us a table and then we give it to whoever needs it. The commission was founded on the first day when the first commissions were founded to respond to the needs of infrastructure (of canvas, tables, paper, etc.). From there, we evolved and we have taken different tasks and others we have delegated to"
other commissions. Like the Commission of Security, which we were running, but it later became the Commission of Coexistence. When it [The Infrastructures Commission] was created we were 10 people, now we are about 25 that work in our stand taking turns. We have created different working groups and we decide in small meetings. We have decided that the responsibility of each is defined by the responsibility of the other, and that is what makes the commission work. Therefore there are many decisions that are made individually by the person who is responsible in turn. Most of what we have is from donations, but we have also bought some stuff with the money from the encampment … We have spontaneous phone calls from volunteers, saying: I was walking by Plaza Gaudi and I saw a couple of wood boards, do you want them? We go there and pick them up … Our great problem is storage. We put stuff where we can. Some of the materials stay here for a while and then are taken out … We do what we can, they ask us for more and more of everything. At the beginning, they wanted canvas, tents, later [they requested] paper, pencils, and now they’re asking for printers, computers, etc., They want electricity! … We have evolved! Though we want to keep in mind the idea that we are in this place only temporarily, and [so] we are ecologically sustainable, therefore it is not imperative that we all have electricity or that we all have a computer. We need to keep the balance; we are not in our homes. (Excerpt from Interview with a participant in the Infrastructure Commission, 15Mbcn.tv, 2011)

This testimony describes how the space of the encampment grew in complexity throughout time. It describes how during the stage in which the encampment was only a number of clusters of conversations in the plaza, the incipient commissions only asked for chairs and tables, and as they became consolidated they started asking for computers and printers. This commission also evolved into a more specific organization. At the beginning it dealt with the security and the harmonic coexistence among commissions. In other words, it dealt with most of the aspects of spatial planning in the encampment. But little by little, it turned into a neutral organism that only provided the commissions with resources. The materials they received had to be adapted to the changing needs of the commissions. At the same time, the commissions adapted to what was available (see Figure 6).

The commission worked similarly to an Informatics platform. They did not provide ‘content’ to the encampment but rather helped managing the inputs coming from outside. They were open to almost any material contribution from sympathizers and participants. Thus, the encampment embraced potentiality, as it was not clear how it was going to transform. This way of operating is a reflection of the commitment to openness that the encampment showed in their assemblies and agoras, in which potentially anyone is allowed to participate, regardless of affiliation, nationality or political ideology. The commission also operated depending on the changing circumstances. They took action as they reflected on each issue (Schön, 1983). The participant in the interview above emphasized the fact that they worked as they could and with what they had. They made decisions based on the resources available and the challenges posed day by day. They also worked tactically, rather than strategically, as they operated within short-term and small-scale frameworks.

The Kitchen Commission: Of paellas and open planning

These spatial and organizational logics were also present in other commissions and the general assembly. The flows of information and communication resembled the material processes happening in the plaza. Nowhere was this more illustrative than in the Kitchen Commission. In the movement’s anniversary encampment of 2012, a young woman and a man working in the Kitchen explained the author how the commission worked, as they served paella to a multitude in line:

Did you know half of all the food in the world is wasted? We are very concerned about that, so everything we serve in the kitchen is made with ‘recycled’ ingredients […] We are very proud to say that everything is made with would-be wasted food from local markets. (Interview at the 12M15M Encampment, 2012)

The Kitchen operated on the basis of volunteer work and donated materials. The supplies for the kitchen came, as they said, from ‘recycling’. These would-be wasted goods from the local markets, restaurants and cafes were often discarded in almost perfect condition. Some of the food was donated by waiters, cooks or owners that sympathized with the movement or simply taken
from disposal containers outside of city markets. In some occasions, the market employees of the market stopped them, but this practice was largely tolerated.

The collection of food was done by so-called ‘recycling brigades’. They formed in different volunteer groups that picked up reportedly good food discarded at local markets. The commission posted signs with instructions for the recyclers: ‘Food recycling. Go [to collect food] after 8PM, when businesses close’, and it also specified what markets to visit in each neighborhood. At one assembly, a girl who participated in the brigades and the kitchen explained how they operated:

The brigades did not only collect food, but also other items that could be used at the encampment. We didn’t know what we were going to get at the markets. We always came with something completely different, but the people from the kitchen always figured out what to do with it […] You wouldn’t imagine the quality of the food they waste. For example, look at this, look at this ... [Showing a whole untouched piece of salami from which she cut a slice] This was going to go straight to the garbage! Can you believe it? (Excerpt from Interviews at the Pre-election Encampment, 2011)

The practice of ‘recycling’ entailed health and sanitation challenges that were the subject of debates in the assemblies and commissions. People in the storage section evaluated the food that came from recycling and donations and washed and cleaned food items in nearby houses or sometimes in the plaza fountains. Nevertheless, city government officials pointed out continuing sanitation issues, which eventually resulted in the encampment’s eviction. Despite these issues, the Kitchen...
Commission’s practices are worth of study as planning phenomena that could not be simply replicated and that would require further improvement and experimentation.

At the encampment, a volunteer of the kitchen explained to a journalist how his commission worked in more detail:

[W]e have mountains and mountains of food, that we get from people who come to donate, [for instance – ] two apples, a kilo of rice, two chocolate cakes, and so on. Over and over until we end with piles of food that is immediately processed as soon as it is brought to the encampment […]

We have around five hundred to one thousand people for lunch. And for dinner we have … well, pretty much everyone you see here at Plaza Catalunya [...] There is always something to do in this commission. We feel like we are working endlessly. If there is a person that knows how to cook well, this person goes to the stove to cook, because that’s what (s)he does best. If there is a person who has great organizational skills, (s)he goes to the storage […]

About the goods, we post what we need in a Twitter account or on posters here in the plaza. We have thirty or forty people working in the commission, but the number of volunteers fluctuates … (Interview with a participant in the Kitchen Commission, 2011)

The paellas and dishes made by the Kitchen serves as an allegory of the encampment. The official origin story of paella is that it evolved from dishes brought by Arabs in the Middle Ages, and different ingredients were incorporated over the centuries. However, the popular version, the one that most people would tell you in the streets of Barcelona, is that paella was the result of community collaboration. In times of scarcity, they say, everyone brought leftovers of food that would not alone make a complete dish and mixed them with rice in a huge pan. If this is true, the mythical paella was always uncertain and its outcomes depended on the food that was available each time.

The preparation of the dish works like an open system. The Kitchen capitalized on and embraced the spontaneous spirit of this traditional dish. The planning of the physical space mimics these logics. The Kitchen is open for inputs of goods and materials that are processed differently everyday. The complexity of its processes increases as more people join the encampment and more commissions come out of the conversations in the plaza. Similar to the information flows happening online and in the physical space of the plaza, the kitchen becomes more efficient and sophisticated as the communication becomes clearer and more specific (see Figure 7).

The testimony of the Kitchen participant is very similar to that of the Infrastructures Commission. They improvised with whatever they had and never really knew what the menu of the day was going to be. The recyclers also described how they did not know what they were going to find available at the markets. The volunteer cooks also changed continuously, so decisions about what and how to cook were decided day by day. They described how goods were brought into the encampment and immediately processed. The kitchen also offers a good example of the double scale of the encampment. It not only provides food for the encampment, but challenges larger economic processes by proving that thousands can be fed with food that would otherwise be discarded. It serves an immediate and a symbolic purpose. The people of the Kitchen took pride in this symbolic action.

The Garden Commission: Open-ended urbanisms
The so-called Garden Commission of the Barcelona Encampment was no less illustrative of the space-making mechanisms going on in the encampment than the Kitchen and Infrastructure Commissions. The garden was the largest space occupied by a single commission in the encampment (about 400 m²). It was proposed by a group of people to the General Assembly, the first week after the establishment of the encampment. Initially, the objective was to replant the flowers in the green space between two fountains that had been spoiled after a week of intense assembly activity, without changing the landscape and urban furniture. Participants later decided to turn the space into an actual community garden. There was no consensus reached about the action but participants made the call to start the action 2 days after it was proposed. The commission described how ‘people started mobilizing; different communal gardens in Barcelona donated seedlings, tools and materials, and so did an agroecologic stores, as well as people that participated independently’ (Interviews with people from the Garden, 2011).
One participant described that he saw a man standing on the green space holding a sign above his head that simply said ‘Garden?’ A man who was provoked by the call explained his experience: ‘I saw people coming closer to the place, and I was over there [in a restaurant terrace] eating a sandwich and I thought Damn! A garden ... a [community] garden in Plaza Catalunya, that’s going to be fantastic! Count on me! I said’. Other people joined the activity of the garden by bringing crops, digging holes, loosening the soil and watering the plants with cubes they filled from the fountains. Another participant explained how the watering was organized: ‘There was a proposal for canalizations of water, someone said he could design the whole mechanism, but we decided that the social value of going to the fountain to collect water could not be substituted by the convenience of mechanized canalization’ (Interviews with people from the Garden, 2011) (see Figures 8, 9 and 10).

Similar to the Kitchen and the Infrastructure commissions, the Garden Commission was perceived as a spatial question rather than an answer.
The person responding to the call to make a garden in the form of the sign, showed how it was not clear what they wanted to pursue. Nevertheless, he joined the enterprise to find out. In that sense, the space of the garden was an open-ended system. It was not clear what was going to come out of it, as it was a question that remained open. The collectives and independent participants who joined the project brought different crops and seeds, and based on that, planned the space. The garden was a space that also worked at two simultaneous scales in the encampment: it was a space to involve people in the communal work, but at the same time it sought to symbolically contest global economic processes.

A participant of the commission explained the objectives of another pop-up urban garden created on top of the esplanade of the Arc de Triomf monument, in the context of the global demonstration of 15 October in 2011, exactly 5 months after the encampment:

What we are promoting with this action is local ecologic agriculture and that food doesn’t have to travel thousands of kilometers across the planet to pollute it. Instead we want to promote traditional markets, preserving local cultures […] [However this is only] a symbolic action […] This is something that has to be done on a daily basis and try to grow-up together, little by little, to make links with people that are in this cause and with people who have no idea about this, but that could know about this little by little to sum up to this cause (Interview with people from the Garden Commission, 15 October 2011)

Next to him, there was a man planting crops who elaborated on the purpose of the garden:

We are here making out of the sterile surface that is Barcelona a productive space for planting, in order to defend the peasantry. [We are also] against all the politicians and planners that have wasted the land, stripping it from the potential to produce food. (Excerpt from Interviews with people from the Garden, 2011)

This participant also focuses on the symbolic dimension of the garden by emphasizing the tensions between rural and urban space. He also mentions how planners are responsible for what he considers the mis-management of urban and green spaces. The commission on many occasions described how the garden was fundamentally a symbolic space. When the action was proposed to the assembly, they described their reasons thus:

[…] We believe that what we have built here is not [only a] physical [action, but rather a symbol] of how the movement of the plaza blossoms as the [garden] that we have planted. […]

[The garden is] a symbol of the re-appropriation of public space […], of the insertion of nature in the city, the demand for more green spaces and the recuperation of empty spaces [and] of the recuperation of the citism through deconstructing the conception of public space […]

[It is an] opportunity to reflect through practice on the model of society that we imagine and dream about […] [and] to invite [people to the plaza] to rethink, reflect and take action together (Proposal of an indignant garden at the plaza, 22 May 2011, http://hortdignebcn.wordpress.com/documents/proposta-dhort-indignat-a-la-placa)

The reasons for the establishment of the garden are both symbolic and immediate. Many participants described the value of the garden as engaging people in communal work. People found a place of encounter in the garden. Symbolically, it invited people to reflect on and rethink the notion of public space in the city. In that sense, it sought to be a space of reflection: a space that embraces
transformation by remaining open and physically permeable to external contributions (see Figure 10).

Conclusions: Urban Laboratories and Open Planning

The analysis of the relationship between the decision-making, regulatory processes and the materialization patterns show that the planning of the encampment was strongly influenced by both insurgent spatial processes and open-source logics, as discussed in the literature review. The observations of the evolution of the encampment and the commissions reveal certain planning principles that the protesters followed and offer questions and lessons for planners and urban designers.

First, we learned that the encampments worked as urban laboratories in which alternative forms of decision-making and space-making processes were tested (De la Llata, 2014). How they debated informed what they wanted to produce in space. In the assemblies, agoras and commissions, the protesters had non-linear debates based on posing questions in cycles that incorporated more voices as more people joined. In this form of ‘spatial Maieutics’, planning processes were aggregative and worked with a program-in-construction that was constantly rethought and modified according to specific challenges. Therefore, it was the result of reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983), deliberative practice (Forester, 1999) and incremental processes. Improvisation and responsive-to-the-context interaction also played an important role in the planning process and was the result of a dialogic tension between the spatial needs

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Figure 10: The Orchard Commission. Diagram of its functioning. Source: Produced by the author.
and the material conditions of the space. Sometimes the participants expressed certain material needs and sought materials to meet those needs, while at other times they designed their spaces on the basis of the materials that were available. The ‘paella approach’ was a form of ‘making sense together’ (Forester, 1989) through bricolage approaches – that is, the act of using ‘whatever is at hand’ and defining its use through its potential (Lévi-Strauss, 1966).

Second, we learned that the spatial interactions in the encampment mirrored the communication happening in the infosphere, and therefore operated as open urban systems permeable to diverse material, organizational and informational inputs from outside and through approaches of what we could call open planning. The notion of the ‘platform’ (that is, Informatics) is a helpful image to understand how the encampment was planned. A platform is a constant interface that enables variable flows and interactions but remains unaffected by them. The Infrastructures Commission was relatively constant in respect to the other commissions and independent of external flows, which were variable. Similarly, the Kitchen accepted everything that was donated and discovered what to do with it on a daily basis. Later, by analyzing the case of the garden, we assessed the implications of planning as an open-ended process. In that case, a program was suggested by the organizers in the form of a question: ‘Garden?’ So, it was not only open-source, but also explicitly open-ended, as it did not seek to become a finished space. The provocation opened possibilities to ‘rethink public space’, as the participants of the garden explained.

Finally, thinking of space as a wiki system is a powerful metaphor for what urban processes could be. In Wikipedia, for example, the entries can be modified by anyone (that is, open-source) and at any time (that is, open-ended). The entries are constantly being modified and altered to the point that the initial entry transforms into something completely different. As time passes, the text becomes longer, more detailed, more debated and more complex. The encampment sought to embrace these kinds of logics.

The urban laboratories and open planning approaches that were tested in the encampment were responses to an underlying condition present in most institutionally planned public spaces: they are planned by relatively very few but used by potentially all citizens. Thus, the encampments tested processes in which the planner, as a leading figure was virtually absent and in which Planning as a discipline and as a professional practice disappeared in favor of planning with a small ‘p’, based on self-organization. The role of the planner, if anything was that of the facilitator, that moderated, provoked and joined the debates about space. Implications and applications of such approaches for planning and urban design involve thinking of planning as a truly open-to-the-public process incorporating citizen participation in situ and in real time. However, debating while implementing simultaneously was only possible because the encampment was planned with light easily reshaped structures. Accordingly, there was a successful balance between the planning approach and the material conditions of the encampment.

The approaches tested in the encampment clash with the implicit and assumed values that normatively define the disciplines of planning and design: (i) the hierarchical relationships within firms and institutions (for example, the head of the firm, associates, assistants) and between institutions and the public (for example, the experts, clients, lay public), (ii) decision-making processes that are exclusionary and not aggregative, as one idea is chosen over – rather than incorporated with and articulated in relation to – another and (iii) the need to suspend debate at a certain point in order to begin implementation.

Adopting these approaches in design firms and planning institutions calls for much more experimentation and debate, which could be the topic of future work. They could be tested in scale as experiments in design schools, firms, think tanks, neighborhood associations and activist organizations. However, they have a direct application in community planning through charrette exercises, which are intense and public planning exercises and use ‘feedback loops’ as their main communication method. Spatial Maieutics is a variant of that method, as it uses non-linear decision-making processes that focuses on open-ended debates that reflect on space. Community charrettes could benefit from incorporating digital tools such as wiki systems and open-source softwares to test how different voices can be incorporated into decision-making processes in real time and how that impacts the material outcomes of design. The encampment processes revalue the importance of planning space from the space itself (that is, planning-in-situ) through engaging in small – apparently unrelated – building tasks that add up to a sense of wholeseness (Alexander, 1979), and also have potential applications in community planning.

Rather than being spaces defined by consensus, the encampments embraced dissensus. Just as
controversial topics become new iterations everyday in real time in Wikipedia, these spaces were in perpetual state of contestation. In that sense, the encampments stressed the public character of public spaces as they turned them into sites in which not everyone agrees and anyone can participate. This created enormous security, sanitation and organizational challenges the protesters had to face and which eventually resulted in the eviction of the encampment. However, the encampments constituted outstanding experiments with alternative planning approaches that should be further studied, rather than just dismissed for being ephemeral and organic. Instead, they should be considered opportunities to learn more about how and why ephemeral and organic planning processes are often dismissed in favor of permanent and definite ones and how that can help us learn about the spatial-temporal frameworks that are often taken for granted as values that define planning and urban design processes.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by The Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT), Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), The Clarence S. Stein Institute for Urban and Landscape Studies, The Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies (through the Tinker and International Research Travel Grants) and Cornell University’s Department of City and Regional Planning. Any opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders. The author thanks John Forester for comments that greatly improved the manuscript. Special thanks to the participants of the Indignados Movement in Barcelona.

Notes

1 The name and inspiration of the Indignados was adopted from Hessel’s (2010) book Indignez vous! which was influential to the 2011 social movements of Southern Europe. In the Spanish-speaking world protesters involved in the 15M Movement started being called Indignados. Later, the word became a synonym of the struggles of 2011 at large.

2 The Indignados’ agora – as well as the encampment in general – was belligerently feminist and internationalist, and sought to include as many voices as possible, unlike its Athenian predecessor, which excluded women, foreigners and slaves from the debates in the agora.

3 In an article recently published at The Guardian it is mentioned that indeed about half of the world food is wasted every year, http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/jan/10/half-world-food-waste

4 In the first week of the encampment, it was estimated that a crowd of 2000 thousand people was continuously at Plaza Catalunya (Vanguardia, 2011, http://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20110518/54156645645/la-acampada-de-barcelona-gana-adeptos.html). However this figure fluctuated a lot, and some state that at some point the Plaza and its surroundings hosted around 50 000 people.

5 This is a reference to the so-called Ordinances of Civism of Barcelona – city government’s laws to foster ‘good citizen values’ (in Catalan: civisme) through the regulation of ‘informal’ uses of public space, such as graffiti, public urination, public nudity, drug and alcohol use, vandalism, prostitution, street-vending, among others. These laws are largely unpopular in Barcelona and have generated mass mobilizations and demonstrations since they were promulgated in 2005.

6 For more on improvisation as a potential urban design tool see Inam (2010). Navigating Ambiguity: Comedy Improvisation as a Tool for Urban Design Pedagogy and Practice. Journal for Education in the Built Environment, 5, 1, 7–26.

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